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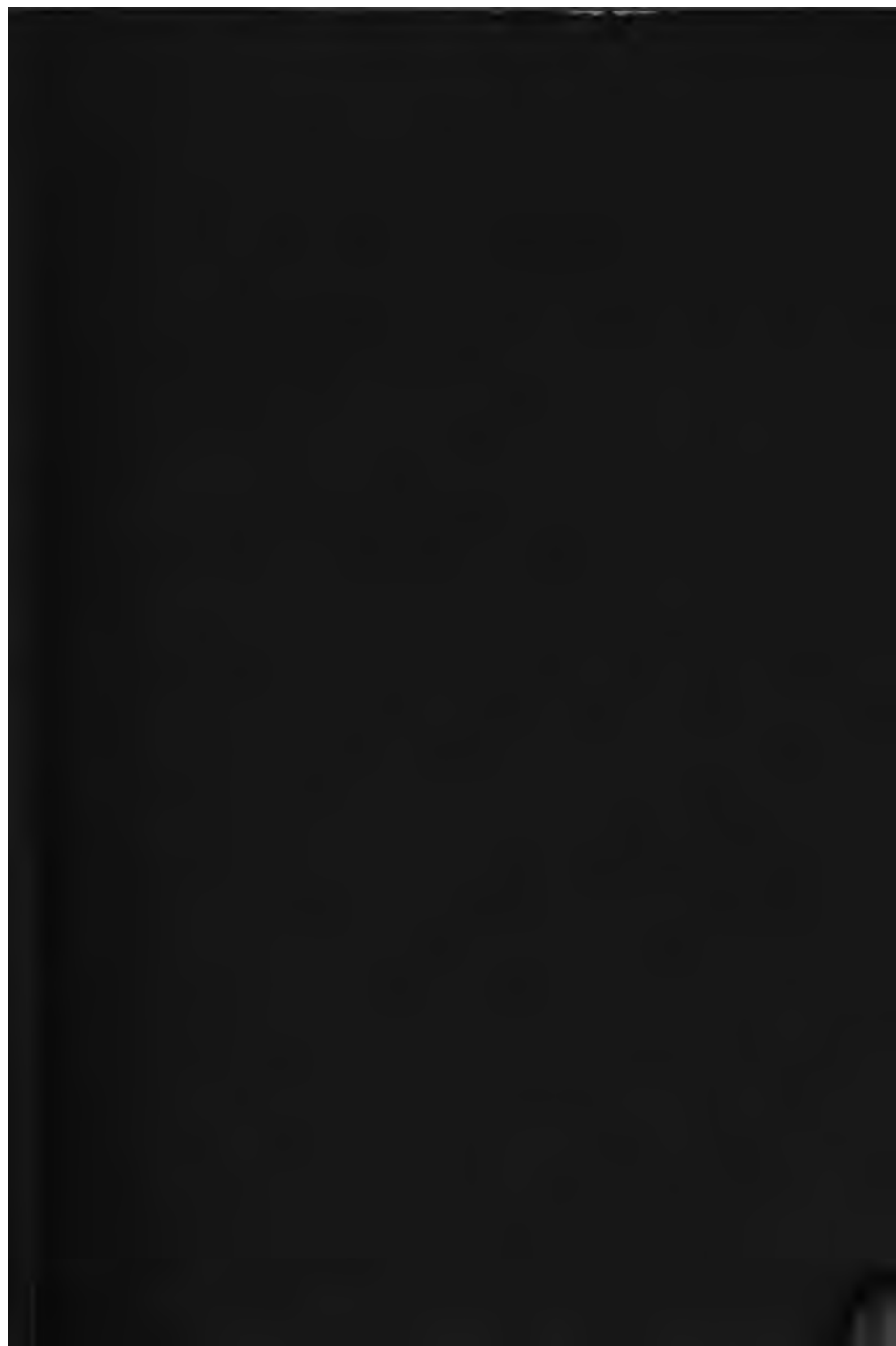
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THOMASINA.

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# THOMASINA:

*A BIOGRAPHY.*

BY

THE AUTHOR OF 'DOROTHY,' 'DE CRESSY,'  
'STILL WATERS,' &c.

'O, gear will buy me rigs o' land,  
And gear will buy me sheep and kye;  
But the tender heart o' leesome luve  
The gowd and siller canna buy.'

*Burns.*

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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# THOMASINA.

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## CHAPTER I.

MRS. GREY had omitted her visits to the Chase since her sister-in-law's death, and she felt it to be her duty to ascertain how far her sinister predictions were justified as to the ill effects which must ensue from leaving Thomasina without even nominal control. She wrote to ask Sir Richard whether it would be convenient to receive her for the month of September, and Sir Richard acquiesced of course, and directed Thomasina to see that her room was ready. 'Aunt Thomasina is coming on Wednesday, and I feel just as if I were going to the dentist's,' Thomasina remarked to her father; yet she

was very dutiful to the old lady when she arrived, rendering to her all those little attentions which it had been Lady Bertram's part to pay in former days.

Mrs. Grey candidly admitted that her forebodings so far were not realised. Thomasina was certainly very much improved; she was gentler, less self-reliant, and, instead of throwing off reproof with the saucy self-will by which she had so often offended her Aunt Thomasina in earlier days, there was a softness in her manner which deprecated, rather than defied, criticism and lent a new charm to her beauty. By-and-by the shrewd old lady began to suspect that the great passion which sways the hearts of men was stirring the depths of her godchild's nature, and she was not slow to impart her suspicions to Sir Richard, who never, as she felt assured, would find out anything for himself.

'Is it true that Sir Harry Camden admires Thomasina?' she asked one day.

‘A good many people do admire her more or less,’ replied Sir Richard. ‘Sir Harry admires her more, no doubt. He is always hovering about her, and might make her an offer if he thought he had any chance; but the child is too young to think of marriage.’

‘Just as much too young as Anthony was too old, Sir Richard.’

‘Do not talk to me of Anthony’s marriage,’ rejoined the old man irritably; ‘I have not got over it at all. How should I, when I see his fat, stupid children, and think that they have come between Thomasina and her inheritance?’

Mrs. Grey could have replied that the inheritance was Anthony’s, but she respected her brother’s prejudices and did not *always* utter the disagreeable truths which occurred to her. She only observed that she supposed that Thomasina would be well portioned.

‘Pretty well for that,’ replied Sir Richard ;

‘I have been laying by for her every year since this confounded second marriage, and there was something settled on her already.’

‘I wonder that you do not do more for Anthony, Sir Richard. I should like to see him live more as befits the only son of the property.’

‘If he has sunk in the scale it is by his own act and choice, since he was determined to marry beneath him. And he will have his turn by-and-by.’

‘If he were my son, Sir Richard, I should not stint him until he is driven to look forward to my death as a deliverance.’

‘Anthony is too meek-spirited to do that, whatever his wife may do.’

‘You are unjust to Mrs. Bertram,’ rejoined Aunt Thomasina. ‘She is quite a lady in manners and appearance, and I doubt whether Anthony could have chosen more wisely for his own happiness. What did you think of

the young Windsors, who were staying here the other day ?’

‘ They are much like other lads of their age. Robin, the sailor, is rather a smart young fellow, and spent a good deal of his time here, riding with us nearly every day. I did not hear the other one open his lips.’

Mrs. Grey pricked up her ears, believing that she had found the clue she sought. ‘ That is why Thomasina is so eager to read the naval intelligence in the “ Times.” I told her the other day that she seemed to know all the ships afloat. How old is this sailor brother ?’

‘ How should I know? He is Windsor’s eldest boy, who used to ride through the park here to school. He is a rattle-brained boy still, and thinks of nothing but his profession. He got Anthony to make interest for him to go out to China, and I believe that he sailed last week.’

Baffled at this point, Mrs. Grey fell back on Sir Harry Camden. 'If Lady Camden is keeping house for her son, I shall go and call upon her this week.'

Sir Richard began dimly to see the drift of what had appeared to him very disjointed talk. 'I can tell you one thing, Thomasina, that you may spare yourself the trouble of match-making for my little girl; I do not want to part with her just yet awhile, and she does not want to go.'

'Probably not, Sir Richard, but that can be no reason why I should not call on my old friend Lady Camden. You live so much out of the world that she is not likely to hear that I am staying with you.'

Accordingly Mrs. Grey proposed to her niece that they should drive together to pay some visits, and, although it was not a social duty in which Thomasina took delight, she complied with a good grace. She was seated

in the carriage before she asked where they were to go, and when Mrs. Grey suggested Ashleigh Court, she was at little pains to conceal her annoyance. 'If you want to call on Lady Camden, Aunt Thomasina, I wish that you would drive round by the cottage and ask Polly to go with you ; I am nearly certain that she owes her a visit.'

'Then we will put her name on your card if Lady Camden is out. Anthony said that he intended to drive Mary out this afternoon.'

'Do you not want to pay any other visits?' said Thomasina; 'I hate the drive to Ashleigh Court. It takes us through a bleak and dreary bit of country.'

'The dulness of the country will not affect us much on such a grey, dull day. To Ashleigh Court,' Mrs. Grey added with decision to the footman, who had been waiting at the carriage-door for his final orders. Thomasina leaned back in her place with an air of dis-



satisfaction, and Mrs. Grey was more than ever convinced that Sir Harry Camden was not an object of indifference, and that her niece felt a girl's coy reluctance to meet her fate.

Ashleigh Court was altogether wanting in the picturesque wildness which gave its charm to Bertram's Chase. It was a trim, stately place, the square red house standing beside a great sheet of water, and the terraces and gardens were laid out with elaborate care. Mrs. Grey, however, looked about her with a critical eye, and decided that everything was in favour of an alliance between the two families. It was a good property; Sir Harry was a young man of irreproachable character and fair abilities, and she was desirous to see Thomasina well married, and still more anxious to further the restoration of Anthony to his proper position. If Thomasina were married to a rich man, Sir Richard would have no excuse for depriving

his son of the income to which he was entitled.

Sir Harry was coming in from shooting when he caught sight of the Bertram liveries, and, instead of turning away, as he would have done in the case of an ordinary visitor, he came forward with great alacrity. 'I believe that my mother is at home,' he said with a smile, which lit up pleasantly his rather heavy features, 'and at any rate you must come in. She cannot be far off, and she would be so sorry to miss you and Miss Bertram.'

Thomasina looked at her aunt, and muttered that it would be a pity to bring Lady Camden in, but Mrs. Grey was obtuse to the hint.

'I think that we had better send the carriage round for a quarter of an hour, Thomasina. If Lady Camden is not in the garden, Sir Harry will be good enough to entertain us for that time.'

Sir Harry was profuse in his expressions

of satisfaction, and Thomasina followed her aunt into the house with unconcealed reluctance. She thought that a man gifted with any delicacy of feeling would have been as disgusted as she was herself with such unblushing manœuvring.

Afternoon tea was not yet an institution, and when Sir Harry had despatched three men to scour the grounds in search of his mother and sisters, he ordered in fruit and wine and water, and insisted on dividing the great clusters of purple grapes and on peeling the peaches which Thomasina declared that she did not want to eat. Conversation languished so long as Sir Harry had to talk to Mrs. Grey and to think of her niece, but his prospects brightened when Lady Camden entered the room. She was too good a mother to repine at the summons which had obliged her to walk hurriedly back when she was a quarter of a mile from home, and

nothing could be more cordial than her reception of both ladies. It was so *very* good of Mrs. Grey to come, and she kissed Thomasina most affectionately and wished that she saw her oftener.

‘If I were not hot and tired, I should like to take you to see the gardens,’ she said; ‘they are really looking very nice.’

Sir Harry took the hint at once. ‘Would *you* like to see them, Miss Bertram?’

‘I hardly think there will be time,’ replied Thomasina.

‘Plenty of time, my dear,’ said Mrs. Grey. ‘You do not want to run away when Lady Camden has come in on purpose to see us? I will stay and have my talk with her.’

Thomasina found the combination of forces too much for her, and allowed Sir Harry to lead the way into the brilliant parterre which lay below the house.

‘It is gay and pretty,’ she said, ‘but I am

not particularly fond of a formal garden ; I like our shrubberies and the wild, broken ground at the Chase better.'

'Do you ?' said Sir Harry, wondering how he could express his perfect readiness to turn the garden, which was the pride of his mother's heart, into a wilderness if only he might find favour in Thomasina's eyes.

'It is all in keeping with the place, however. It is natural that I should like the Chase better,' said Thomasina, and Sir Harry, in deep discouragement, walked by her side almost in silence, and only betrayed his sentiments by picking with ruthless hands every flower for which she expressed the slightest admiration.

The two elder ladies in the drawing-room had come to a better understanding. Lady Camden remarked on Thomasina's brilliant beauty, and Mrs. Grey replied, without enthusiasm, that pretty girls of her age were

apt to receive more admiration than they deserved, although Sir Richard would not like to hear her say so. Then Lady Camden deplored the lonely life a girl must lead at the Chase, and said that her daughters would be so delighted to see more of her, and, since Mrs. Grey admitted that it would be a good thing for Thomasina, Lady Camden hoped that she might be allowed to spend a few days with them next week, when they would have a large party staying in the house. Mrs. Grey thought that, if Lady Camden would entrust her with a note to Sir Richard, the matter might be arranged, but she would not advise her to say anything first to Thomasina. Throughout the dialogue there was not the most distant allusion to Sir Harry, yet Lady Camden knew that Mrs. Grey had pledged herself to favour his suit as fully as if she had signed and sealed a contract to that effect.

When they drove off, with Lady Camden's note to Sir Richard in Mrs. Grey's pocket, she thought it well to pave the way for its reception. 'Lady Camden wants you to go and stay there next week, Thomasina; I believe that she has written to Sir Richard about it.'

'She asked me once before, but I certainly shall not go,' said Thomasina.

'At all events I suppose you will hear what Sir Richard has to say in the matter?'

'He will hear what I have to say. I cannot imagine why you should force me into an intimacy with people whom I do not like. I did not want to call on the Camdens to-day, and I am determined not to go again.'

'In my younger days, Thomasina, young ladies did not think it necessary to refuse offers of marriage before they were made.'

'It is most unfair to say such things,' said

Thomasina with flaming cheeks. 'If people talk, it is the fault of those who try to throw us together, and Sir Harry ought to know that I would not marry him if there was not another man in the world.'

'Then surely you need not be afraid of going to stay with his mother and sisters. To hear you talk, one might suppose that poor Sir Harry was a second Lovelace.'

'Is not Lovelace the hero of "Clarissa Harlowe"?' said Thomasina, glad to turn the conversation. 'I began the book once, and Sir Richard took it away from me, as he thought it would not quite do. Of course I have wanted to read it ever since.'

'You want some one besides Sir Richard to keep you in order, though this does credit to his discretion. But, to return to the invitation, you must not make yourself absurd by refusing it. I told Lady Camden that you had no engagement.'



‘She knows that Sir Richard never goes out now, and that I do not leave him.’

‘That excuse can scarcely be valid now that I am here to look after him,’ said Mrs. Grey. Thomasina felt that her aunt’s society could not supply the void created by her absence, but she reserved her opposition until it should be necessary to reply to the invitation. Mrs. Grey, however, outwitted her by a grand stroke of diplomacy; she asked Thomasina if she would like to be dropped at the cottage, to walk home, while she herself returned in the carriage in time to lay the matter before Sir Richard before the post-bag was closed. She extorted from him an unwilling consent and wrote herself to Lady Camden, so that she had the satisfaction of informing Thomasina, on her return, that the invitation was accepted.

‘Your aunt told me that you wanted to

go,' said Sir Richard, observing Thomasina's air of discomfiture.

'I only said that it would be a good thing for her,' said Mrs. Grey, and Thomasina went up to her own room in great displeasure.

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. GREY ordered new dresses for Thomasina from a noted London dressmaker, but her rebellious spirit was not to be appeased by such blandishments, and she set out on her visit to Ashleigh Court with a resolute determination not to enjoy herself. Life had not gone smoothly with her for some time; there was coldness and reserve between her and Mary, and it was tacitly understood that Robin's name should not be mentioned between them. Anthony, unconscious of the motive which prompted her enquiries, was ready enough to tell her all he knew, and from him Thomasina learned that Robin had passed for lieutenant and was appointed to the 'Arethusa,' a ship on the

China station. Anthony added that he was a lucky fellow to get such a chance of distinguishing himself in active service, instead of idling about at home, nor did it appear that Robin took a different view of his good fortune. But, however that might be, Thomasina resolved to remain heart-whole until his return. If then indeed he lacked courage to break through the trammels which his sister had thought fit to impose on him, she would think of him no more; in the meanwhile she thought of him a good deal.

Lady Camden and her daughters vied with each other in their expressions of satisfaction that Thomasina should at last have been induced to visit Ashleigh Court. Bessy and Florence Camden were good, uninteresting girls, who had been carefully drilled out of any originality they might once have possessed. They were highly accomplished—that is to say they practised with assiduity half-a-dozen

stock pieces of music, with which they always led off the musical performances at their own house ; they talked British-French with ungrammatical fluency, and spoke their own language with a foreign accent ; they dressed nicely and moved well, were very affectionate to other young ladies, and were quiet, without being at all shy, in their manners to young men. Thomasina was always less disposed to regret the deficiencies of her own education when she saw the results on which Lady Camden prided herself. In spite of the opinion she had expressed of Sir Harry, she found it more easy to converse with him than with his sisters, although he was too diffident of his powers of pleasing her ever to do himself justice in her presence. Thomasina had only seen the ladies of the house on her arrival, and, when she came in dressed for dinner, Sir Harry greeted her with effusion, and then retreated again after intro-

ducing to her his cousin, Mr. Edward Noel. Lady Camden's apparent efforts to marshal her guests so as to reserve a place for Miss Bertram beside her son were overcome by Thomasina's passive resistance, and she found herself seated, in the middle of the long dinner table, between an elderly gentleman, of which she knew just enough to declare that he was uninteresting, and the Mr. Noel who had taken her in to dinner. He was a singular-looking man, pale and spare, with strong features and very black eyebrows. Thomasina thought of Robin's fair, boyish face and decided that she should not like him.

For some time nothing passed between them but the ordinary civilities of the table, but presently Mr. Noel asked, with startling abruptness, 'What *ought* we to talk about, Miss Bertram? You have cut off the usual supplies of conversation by declaring that

you never go to London, so that I must say nothing about the opera or Landseer's last picture. What are the subjects which circulate at country dinner parties ?'

'Poachers, pheasants, and foxes,' said Thomasina.

'I thought these were reserved until after dinner. They are scarcely feminine subjects,' rejoined Noel.

'I never made a science of conversation, and I have not been to many dinner parties. I did not want to come to-night,' said Thomasina.

'Perhaps,' said Noel smiling, 'you do not know that I am staying in the house and that Lady Camden is my aunt ?'

Thomasina coloured at the implied caution, though she answered, with characteristic candour, 'Yes, I believe I did know it, and I beg your pardon if I have said anything rude.'

‘Not at all; I was afraid that I might be taking an unfair advantage of your ignorance. I quite admit the general heaviness of country dinner parties, but it is our business to make this one a brilliant exception. Do not think too meanly of me if I confess that I do not know much about foxes, except that they have pointed noses and bushy tails. I am willing to receive instruction.’

‘I did not say that I liked to talk about foxes,’ said Thomasina with some pique; ‘I get rather tired of the subject.’

‘Then we must try something else. Do you take an interest in politics?’

‘I think I do—at least I like to read the debates to my grandfather. The unsatisfactory part of it is that I am doubtful which side to take.’

‘Then I predict that you are in a promising frame of mind to become a disciple of the Whig or Radical school. Of course you are a Tory by tradition?’



‘Why of course?’ asked Thomasina.

‘Did you not tell me that you never went to London? I have a wide experience of country neighbourhoods, and can fearlessly assert that nothing short of an annual visit to town can implant the seeds of Liberal principles in the feminine mind. High Toryism is indigenous to the soil.’

‘I suppose that women can think for themselves in the country as well as in town?’ said Thomasina.

‘They can, only as a matter of fact they do not—at least they do not think out anything,’ replied Noel.

‘How are we to think out any matter of which we have an imperfect knowledge?’ said Thomasina with some vehemence.

‘Precisely so, Miss Bertram. And fuller knowledge is not to be attained in the limited sphere of a country neighbourhood. My aunt was good enough to tell me this

afternoon that my visionary and unpractical views would never obtain favour from the county magnates, and that, if I do not relinquish them or my hopes of a seat in Parliament, I must take refuge in "some low Radical borough."

'Do you intend to make politics your career?'

'If the fates are propitious. Many of my friends tell me that it is a mistake.'

'It is a great career if men really aim at redressing wrongs,' said Thomasina.

'I suppose that most men begin with some such intention ; but the difficulty is, as you observed just now, to agree on what is right or wrong.'

'I think that the China war is wrong,' said Thomasina.

'Do not think me impertinent, Miss Bertram, if I remark that you take up politics from the feminine point of view. The

female mind always takes refuge in the concrete. If it will bring down the price of butcher's meat, then I am a free-trader ; if not, I am a protectionist. From these premises I conclude that, if you object to the China war, it is because you have a brother or cousin engaged in it.'

'I have no brother or cousin there—only a sort of connection,' said Thomasina, the vivid colour flushing into her cheeks.

'Exactly ; that admission will do equally well for my argument. Now, before you can decide on the justice or expediency of the China war, you ought to read every page of the Blue Book which has been printed on the subject. I brought it down with me last night, and it is quite at your service.'

'Thank you ; I should like to look at it, just to see what a Blue Book is like ; but if I *do* read every word of it, my opinion

of the China war will be just what it is now.'

'Of course it will be unchanged. A true woman will set the welfare of a "sort of connection" much above the honour of England.'

'You have already implied that women are sordid, and that remark means that you think me very silly,' said Thomasina with some petulance.

'I am afraid that it means that I was impertinent, and that we had better not talk politics.'

'But I want to talk politics, if only you will treat me as a reasonable being. I want to understand things, and I have not the least idea what you mean by the concrete.'

Mr. Noel dropped his bantering tone, and an earnest discussion followed, in which he said many things which would appear altogether out of date in these pages, for he

undertook to confute opinions which are, for the most part, exploded fallacies, and by which few would be more astonished than the Conservatives of the present generation. Thomasina was eager and interested; she said many crude things, but crude sayings are easily forgiven when they fall from the lips of a pretty, intelligent girl who speaks as she thinks, not as she imagines that other people would expect her to think.

‘How well you got on with Edward Noel, dear,’ said Florence Camden when they adjourned to the drawing-room. ‘Although he is my cousin, and we know him very well, I am always afraid to talk to him; he is so very sarcastic.’

‘He *is* sarcastic,’ said Thomasina; ‘at first I did not like it, but it is good intellectual exercise to talk to him, and it keeps one awake.’

‘What an odd girl you are! But I dare-

say that he liked to talk to you, because you are so clever.'

'On the contrary, he told me, almost in so many words, that I was exceedingly silly.'

'How rude of him! Mamma does not like his opinions, and says that he is very conceited; but Harry likes him, and then you know that one must keep up with one's cousins. Harry would ask him here, although we shall not know what to do with him when the other gentlemen go out shooting. He does not care for country pursuits, and it is disagreeable to have him hanging about the drawing-room, looking supercilious.'

Thomasina thought, on the contrary, that his presence might be a welcome diversion in the long hours between breakfast and luncheon, when young ladies compare their fancy work and discuss what shall be the object of the afternoon's drive. Edward

Noel did not come into the drawing-room with the other gentlemen, but he appeared shortly afterwards, bearing the promised Blue Book, and Thomasina was doubtful whether she ought to be pleased or annoyed by the parade with which he set it down before her. Sir Harry Camden was not doubtful about *his* sensations ; while he was hovering around, feeling that this was the time to forward his suit, since his mind was no longer occupied by the cares of hospitality, it was really trying to see his cousin step in before him, draw a chair in to the table, and sit down close to Miss Bertram, that he might help her to turn over the leaves of the book. In this first evening's acquaintance Noel had made more progress towards intimacy than poor Sir Harry after two years of unswerving constancy and adoration.

Thomasina believed that the loyalty of her attachment to Robin was proved by the

interest she took in the China Blue Book, but she certainly found Mr. Noel's comments more instructive than the documents on which they were founded, and she turned over the pages more listlessly when he left her to procure a cup of tea. Sir Harry watched his opportunity and stepped into his place.

‘If you wish to read, Miss Bertram, I might supply you with something more interesting than a Parliamentary Blue Book.’

‘Thank you,’ replied Thomasina; ‘this interests me very much, but I do not care to read it now. I must ask Mr. Noel to let me take it upstairs with me.’

‘He must be a fortunate man who has interested you in so unpromising a subject,’ said Sir Harry; and Thomasina replied, as if in order to punish him for so unworthy a feeling,

‘I should think that your cousin had the



art of making the driest subject interesting. I should like to hear him speak in Parliament.'

'I am not at all sure that he will find a seat; he has very little local interest. I have sometimes thought of going into Parliament,' said Sir Harry.

'Have you?' said Thomasina, mentally resolving that the debates in which Sir Harry was likely to take part were not those which she would wish to attend. Edward Noel returned and dispossessed his cousin of his vantage ground with cool audacity.

'Why, Harry, you have got my chair. There was another paper which I wished Miss Bertram to read—not a long one. I daresay that you have had nearly enough of the subject?'

'No, indeed,' said Thomasina; 'I am ready to go on all night.'

Sir Harry could only accept his dismissal

and transfer his attentions elsewhere. . As he sauntered away he was quite ready to agree with his mother and sisters in their estimate of Edward Noel. He was conceited, overbearing, and supercilious, and it would be long before he received another invitation to Ashleigh Court.

Thomasina had thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Her heart was, and should remain, loyal to Robin; but she was conscious that the homage of a man of admitted ability and high culture gratified the intellectual cravings of her nature. Of course there were intelligent, sensible men in their circle of acquaintance. Sir Harry himself was sensible, and there was a world of contempt implied in this admission. But men who could talk, who could skim the surface of things, or could exhaust their depths, as seemed good to them, who could speak in epigrams or with an eloquent glow of words, such men had not

hitherto come within the range of her experience. She lay awake half the night in the same sort of mental excitement which is felt by some young people after a ball or a play, and she rose early, not to read the Blue Book, but to write down in her diary some of those incisive sayings which had most caught her fancy.

Want of sleep did not make Thomasina dull and heavy-eyed, and candle-light was not needed to give brilliancy to her beauty, for the smooth roundness of youth and bright, fresh colouring of perfect health must have given a charm to far homelier features. Fortune favoured Sir Harry at the breakfast table, and Thomasina found a place at his side, while Noel was forced to content himself with the conversation of his insipid cousins. Sir Harry was urgent with Thomasina to name the object of the afternoon drive, for which he said that he should make

a point of returning, although he must shoot with the other gentlemen before luncheon; and Thomasina was equally resolute in disclaiming any special preference, although she said that she should be delighted to go wherever Lady Camden liked to take her.

‘There is the Roman camp,’ said Sir Harry; ‘it must be quite out of your neighbourhood at the Chase.’

‘Yes,’ said Thomasina, with polite indifference; ‘I shall be very glad to see it.’

‘How can you say so, Miss Bertram?’ said Noel, glancing across the table with a smile; ‘I see that you dread an archæological lecture.’

‘If anyone is likely to be as tedious as the Antiquary, of course I would rather stay at home,’ replied Thomasina. ‘When I went through my course of Waverley Novels, my father was too conscientious to spare me a line of the disputes between Sir Arthur and

Monkbarns, although he was as much bored with them as I was. Ever since the name of a Roman encampment has made me shiver.'

'We will go somewhere else then,' said Sir Harry; 'you and my mother must settle it and make all arrangements for riding or driving. Will you shoot, Edward, or walk with us if you do not care to shoot?'

'No, thank you,' said Edward; 'I will reserve myself for the afternoon.'

'If you have letters to write, you will find all that you want in the library.'

'Thank you,' Edward said again; 'I will take care of myself.'

And he did take care of himself after the manner deprecated by his cousins, for he established himself in the drawing-room and took up a newspaper. The other gentlemen went out shooting. Lady Camden disappeared after a while, and the young ladies invited Thomasina into their boudoir; but

she preferred staying where she was. She put a few stitches into the tapestry which had been her company work for the last two years, and Florence and Bessy worked diligently, and conversed after their fashion, asking questions about Thomasina's occupations and acquaintance and volunteering information respecting their own. Mr. Noel put in a word now and then, and in such desultory talk the morning wore away; but Thomasina believed that it would have been equally desultory and much more tedious if he had betaken himself to the library. Nor did Edward Noel find it unprofitable; he glanced over his newspaper, and sometimes laid it aside altogether, and summed up his observations in the conviction that Thomasina was the most beautiful, fascinating woman he had ever seen. It was absurd of Lady Camden to take him aside and tell him, in the strictest confidence, that poor Harry was desperately

in love with Miss Bertram, and that her relations were by no means averse to the match. Anyone might see with half an eye that Sir Harry had no chance, and, since this was so, why should he not go in and win ?

## CHAPTER III.

‘WELL, Thomasina, and how did you enjoy yourself?’ asked Sir Richard when she returned home after her three days’ visit.

‘Much better than I expected,’ she answered frankly; ‘there were some pleasant people staying in the house.’ She chose to use the plural noun, although it was of one pleasant man that she thought.

‘Now tell me, Thomasina,’ continued the old man, after looking round to ascertain that no third person was present, ‘is there anything between you and Sir Harry? Your aunt has been bothering about it while you were away, and, though it is not for an old man like me to stand in your light, I cannot bear to think that the time has come when I must part with my little girl.’



‘I know that Aunt Thomasina has been bothering, grandfather. She drove me to Ashleigh Court quite against my will; but it has really turned out very well, for I am sure that Sir Harry sees now, more plainly than he ever did before, that I do not care for him in the least.’ It would have been strange if Sir Harry had *not* seen it, considering that Thomasina had not bestowed a word or a look on anyone but Edward Noel during the whole time that he was under his roof.

‘I am glad to hear you say so, my dear,’ said Sir Richard, ‘although I am sorry for poor Sir Harry too, against whom I have not a word to say. But I hope that the right man will not come just yet; it will be a bad day for me whenever he does, and you may as well wait for him until I am in my grave, since it cannot be very long first.’

‘I know that Aunt Thomasina has been

telling you that you are getting old. I think you just as young as ever you were, and, as for being in a hurry to get married, I intend to wait ever so many years.' She had indeed settled with herself that it would be necessary to wait until Robin was a post-captain. Within the last two days her views of the enormity of Mary's offence were considerably modified, and she was even disposed to be grateful to her for having averted the absurdity of a declaration of love from a midshipman. Of course she would be constant to him, just as constant as if any words of love had passed between them, but it was certainly a relief to feel that they were both absolutely unfettered ; and, in order to avert the danger of any unreasonable pining, she resolved to cultivate her mind, and in particular to pursue that study of politics prescribed by Mr. Noel.

'Have we got a book called "Smith's

Wealth of Nations," grandfather? I think I have seen the name in running over the backs of the books, but I do not know on which shelf it lies.'

'Yes, I think I have the book somewhere,' replied Sir Richard; 'there was a good deal of talk about it when I was a young man. Adam Smith was a pragmatistical Scotchman, who thought that he could set the world to rights with his newfangled notions.'

'Mr. Edward Noel, a nephew of Lady Camden's, who was staying in the house, said that it was impossible to understand politics without going back to first principles.'

'First fiddlesticks!' returned Sir Richard; 'how will they help me to let my farms when corn falls below the average at which it will pay to grow it?' However, he took some pains to lay his hand on Adam Smith's works, and wiped a thick layer of dust

from off the volume before he allowed Thomasina to touch it with her rosy fingers.

Mrs. Grey suspected that her bold move in Sir Harry's favour had not been successful, but she was not certain of the fact until Lady Camden called with her two daughters a day or two afterwards. The young ladies, responding to a hint from their mother, expressed a desire to see the garden, and this gave Lady Camden the opportunity of confiding to Mrs. Grey her uneasiness about the poor child whom she was quite ready to love as a daughter; she said that Thomasina was certainly a little flighty and too fond of admiration, and Edward Noel, of whom, although he was her nephew, she must say that she had a very indifferent opinion, had quite turned her head by the foolish attentions which men are so willing to pay to the pretty girls who encourage them. They were as unmeaning as they were

foolish, since poor Edward was in no position to marry, and it would be some time before he received another invitation to Ashleigh Court.

Since Mrs. Grey was far from considering Sir Harry Camden the only suitable match for Thomasina in the neighbourhood, she was not disheartened by this admission of failure. She remarked that in that case Thomasina and Mr. Noel were very unlikely to meet again, and no great harm could have been done in a three days' visit and under Lady Camden's watchful eye. Most girls were ready enough to flirt when they were properly, or improperly, encouraged to do so, and she did not pretend to consider her niece more modest or discreet than her contemporaries.

Thomasina meanwhile was gleaning scraps of information from her companions on the terrace walk. 'Is all your party broken up?' she asked.

‘ They are all gone but Edward Noel, and he goes to-morrow,’ replied Florence Camden.

‘ He wished to come here with us to-day, only it was not convenient for mamma to have the large carriage,’ added Bessy incautiously ; and I am sorry to confess that the admission provoked an inward comment from Thomasina that Lady Camden was a spiteful, ill-natured old thing. She instantly resolved to defy any inference that might be drawn from her words, and said,

‘ Do tell him how sorry I am not to see him again before he leaves the neighbourhood. I was particularly anxious to talk over Smith’s “Wealth of Nations” with him ; say that I began to read it the day I came home, and do not find it nearly as dry as he predicted.’

Florence thought it possible that she might forget the message, while Bessy astutely con-

sidered the dislike which most men express to female politicians and promised to deliver it.

It was a great pleasure to Mary Bertram to find herself forgiven and again on the old familiar terms with Thomasina. She went and came to the cottage, she petted the children, and tried, as fruitlessly as ever, to interest Sir Richard in their wise sayings; and she evinced her renewed confidence in Mary by expatiating on Aunt Thomasina's many offences, whose visit, as she declared, would never come to an end. The end was, however, reached at last, and Mrs. Grey fired her parting shot after the carriage which was to convey her had come to the door.

‘ Well, good-bye, Thomasina. I hope that you will go on quietly and get into no scrapes before I see you again. It would be a great satisfaction to me to hear that you had given

up hunting, especially after what has passed between you and Sir Harry.'

'*Nothing* has passed between me and Sir Harry,' said Thomasina stoutly.

'Well, well, Thomasina, you know what I mean. People will talk about young ladies in the hunting field, and if you do not ride with him, it may be with less fit company. I wonder that you can bear to go out now that your poor father has been obliged to put down his hunters.'

'As neither of my horses are up to his weight, we should only be companions in misfortune and vex Sir Richard if I stayed at home,' said Thomasina.

'One comfort is that Sir Richard himself admits that he shall not go out after this winter; he is quite too old for it now.'

'What a very odd piece of comfort!' rejoined Thomasina. 'It is only when you are here that he is ever reminded of his age, and



I am glad to believe that Sir Richard will enjoy going out with me, soberly of course, for some winters to come.'

It was with such amenities as these that the aunt and niece parted. Sir Richard came in to say that the carriage was ready, and, while he accompanied his sister to the door, Thomasina executed a pirouette round the room with an animation on which the Bertram ancestors seemed to look down from their picture-frames with grim amazement. She was still breathless when Sir Richard returned.

'Well, grandfather, how do you feel? I am ever so much better since I heard the gravel crunching under the carriage wheels and knew that she was really off.'

'It is quite right that she should come once a year,' said Sir Richard, 'but I am never sorry when the visit is over, and I do not think that your aunt's tongue grows smother

with years. For one thing, I believe that she used to say a good many disagreeable things to your poor granny, and now they all fall to my share.'

'And to mine, grandfather; do not suppose that I am spared. What a nice, comfortable dinner we shall have this evening, and how much better-tempered all the servants will be!'

'They do say,' observed Sir Richard, in a meditative tone, 'that she had a bad time of it with Robert Grey, but I should think that she gave him as good as she got. There is no denying that she is an aggravating woman, and the confounded part of it is that what she says is so apt to come true.'

'She said or thought that I was going to have Sir Harry, and that will not come true at any rate,' said Thomasina. 'It is too late to ride this afternoon, and I will go for a

wander in the park, to satisfy myself that I am once more a free woman.'

The year was now far advanced. The hazel coppices were nearly leafless, and the elms were grey and thinly clad, but great masses of golden-brown leaves still clung to the beech-trees, and the fading fronds of bracken streaked the ground with russet. Thomasina walked through the rustling leaves with an alert step, startling the hares from their forms, and starting herself at the whirr of a cock pheasant as he flew heavily from his perch on some branch which overhung the path. She reached a knoll which overlooked the wildest and most broken ground in the park, now glorified by the autumn sunshine, which lighted up the great boles of scattered trees and threw their long shadows across the turf. Thomasina threw herself down on the elastic couch formed by the withered bloom of the heather, and looked around with keen enjoy-

ment of the scene, although her mood had changed since she left the house, and her spirits were in a state of flutter and excitement for which she could scarcely account. She was possessed by that imperious craving for positive happiness which so often consumes the heart of youth. In middle age we learn to limit our aspirations, not perhaps more easy of attainment, to some little respite from the sordid, wasting cares which stifle the growth of spiritual and intellectual life, and in old age we are apt to return to the unreasoning carelessness of youth, and neither hanker after the past nor look forward to the future. But the young, with their pulses full of life and their hearts as yet unchilled by disappointment and shortcomings, fret against every obstacle which besets the path to their ideal of happiness, and cannot rest satisfied with its imperfect attainment.

Could it be in answer to such a mood that there came a crashing through the brushwood and the trampling of a horse's feet, and Thomasina looked up to see Edward Noel riding down the woodland path? That the meeting was equally unexpected by both was very plain, and that the first feeling of surprise was quickly lost in pleasure was at least equally evident. Noel pulled up his horse for a moment, and then rode up to her and dismounted.

‘I learned at one of the lodges that I might ride this way without going too near the house, but I did not expect to see you, Miss Bertram.’

‘Nor I you. Are you staying at Ashleigh?’

‘No; in fact, the Camdens do not know that I am in the neighbourhood. I have brought my horse down to Marston Abbas, where the inn is very fair, and I intend to

hunt in this country for the next three months.' It was with evident embarrassment that Noel thus accounted for his appearance, and Thomasina found it infectious.

'I did not know that you cared for hunting?' she said shyly.

'I am not keen about sport, like my cousin Harry.'

'And I thought that you were to select your "low Radical borough" and begin to canvass it in November?'

'You have a good memory, Miss Bertram. But it is still doubtful whether there will be a dissolution in the spring, and I can safely defer my canvassing until February.'

'I have nearly finished the "Wealth of Nations,"' said Thomasina abruptly.

'I heard that you had begun it; my cousin gave me your message. Do you know,' Edward Noel added, with a smile of peculiar brightness, 'that it was that message

which decided my inclination to come down to Marston Abbas ?'

There was no answering smile on Thomasina's face. She had a good deal of what was euphuistically termed the Bertram temperament—in plainer words, obstinacy—and since she had settled it with herself that she was in love with Robin Windsor, even in some sort engaged to him, she did not care to have this conviction disturbed by words which made her heart beat with unruly vehemence. 'Can I direct you how to make a round of the park ?' she said gravely ; 'I must be walking homewards.'

'I should like to walk a little way with you, if I knew what to do with this animal.'

'Shall I lead him for you ?' said Thomasina, smiling now, for Noel did not appear to be on perfectly easy terms with his horse, which was not alarmingly spirited.

'You are severe upon me,' he replied,

slipping the horse's rein through his arm and continuing to walk by her side. 'You know that it is not given to every man to be born and bred in a hunting country.'

'You are very much mistaken, Mr. Noel, if you imagine that, because I like the exercise, I care for the society of hunting men. I think that there is nothing more vapid than their talk as such.'

'Then you will be tolerant of my shortcomings in a new rôle. You will not expect me to hunt four days a week, to time all the quick runs, and to note the good points of my own horses and the bad points of my neighbours'. Do you think that I may hope to make Sir Richard Bertram's acquaintance?'

'He will be very glad to see you,' said Thomasina, 'and I hope that you will also know my father and Mrs. Bertram, who live on the outskirts of the park.'



‘ At which house are *you* to be found, Miss Bertram ? ’

‘ I live with my grandfather,’ said Thomasina. She was not sorry that the roads here diverged, and that the gate through which she must pass was too narrow to admit Noel’s horse. She was pleased that he had come into the neighbourhood, and not displeased to believe that he came for her sake, but she did not wish that his motive should be so broadly hinted, and she thought that it might be best for both that they should meet for the future in general society.

## CHAPTER IV.

LADY CAMDEN felt deeply injured when she learned that her nephew had established himself at Marston Abbas for the winter. She remarked that his newly awakened zeal for hunting was a flimsy pretext which could deceive no one, and that he would not have risked his chances of obtaining a seat in Parliament unless he had preferred the possibility of retrieving his scattered fortunes by marrying an heiress. Sir Harry may have been more seriously aggrieved, but he said less about it, and when they met in the hunting field he nodded to his cousin in a friendly way and hoped that he was well mounted.

\*It was a bright day, the first good meet

of the season, and of course Thomasina and Sir Richard were there. She looked radiant and happy, and having previously told her grandfather that she liked Mr. Noel very much, and hoped to see him often, she introduced him without a shade of embarrassment, and had the satisfaction of hearing Sir Richard couple his apologies for not having left his card upon him at the 'George,' with an invitation to join their family party at dinner any day that suited him. Noel accepted the invitation with alacrity for the following evening, and he rode with them throughout the day.

'I don't know why a fellow like that should put up at the "George,"' Sir Richard remarked when they parted; 'a London club would be more in his line.'

'He has come down for hunting,' said Thomasina composedly.

'He takes his hunting in a very ladylike

way. It is very well for you and for an old fellow like me to look out for the gates, but at his age I liked to go straight across country.'

'He was not very well mounted,' said Thomasina, sensitive to the criticism; 'and besides, as he is almost a stranger here, he was glad to ride with us.'

'I thought you told me that he was a cousin of Camden's?'

'So he is; but I don't think that his politics quite suit Sir Harry,' said Thomasina incautiously.

'Then his politics won't suit me, Thomasina. I cannot put up with any new-fangled notions, and, now I come to think about it, it was Noel who told you to read Adam Smith.'

'Yes, grandfather; there is nothing new-fangled in that, since you said that you read his books when you were a young man,

I am sure that you will not find out that Mr. Noel is a Radical, if he *is* a Radical, unless you begin the subject of politics, and you know that I do not like you to talk of the corn-laws, because I have heard so often all you have to say about them. We will have a nice, peaceable evening; and I must ask father and Polly to come, for I suppose that is what you mean by a family party?’

‘Yes, you had better ask Anthony, and then I shall not be bothered to make talk after dinner,’ said Sir Richard, in whose eyes Anthony’s wife was still a cipher.

Mrs. Gibbs, the housekeeper, thought that Miss Bertram was needlessly particular about the dinner, considering that there was only to be one gentleman guest besides the family, and Mary was equally at a loss to understand why Thomasina charged her to wear the most becoming of the evening

dressess which used to appear at dinner parties in regular succession. But Mary, as well as Mrs. Gibbs, acknowledged Thomasina's supremacy, and her wishes were gratified accordingly. Edward Noel understood the situation too well to distinguish Thomasina by any particular attention, and she was quiet and reserved ; but the evening was a pleasant one, and, when he rose to take leave, the cordiality with which Sir Richard regretted that he had not asked him to stay the night proved that he had made no unfavourable impression.

‘ He is an intelligent young fellow,’ said Sir Richard when his guest had departed, ‘ though he cannot ride so well as our friend Sir Harry. People do say that he is a Radical and free-thinker, but I saw nothing of it.’

‘ Hath not a Jew eyes ?’ asked Thomasina. The quotation was lost upon Sir Richard,

but Mary enquired whether they were to conclude that Mr. Noel was like Shylock.

‘Not exactly, Polly; I only mean that a Radical is not altogether beyond the pale of humanity.’

‘I hope that you are not going to take up politics,’ said Mary a little anxiously; ‘I think that it would annoy Sir Richard.’

‘He may not like it at first, but, when he is reconciled to the idea, he will declare that it is a laudable and excellent pursuit for women. You know the process.’ And Mary smiled, acknowledging Thomasina’s power to win over Sir Richard from the strongest opposition to whatever might be her reigning fancy.

Edward Noel’s intimacy with the Bertrams was established after this evening. They met more frequently at the Chase than in the hunting field, for Sir Richard was certainly growing old, and Thomasina was less zealous

about the sport, and they went out but little as the winter advanced. There was a succession of early frosts that year, foggy, slippery mornings, which made it doubtful whether the scent would lie or not and daunted the hearts of all but the most ardent sportsmen. At first Thomasina was disappointed when Sir Richard sent the horses back to the stable, but she was not inconsolable when she found that Mr. Noel shared his disinclination to hunt in such weather. She heaped the library grate with roaring logs and coiled herself into the deep leathern armchair in which she loved to read, and seldom waited in vain for the sound of horses' footsteps, which heralded Noel's approach. He sometimes rode over in the afternoon, and was persuaded to stay to dinner in his morning dress, but he was more apt to appear in the morning and spend an hour or two with Thomasina before Sir Richard came in, to assume, as a matter



of course, that he had come to stay to luncheon.

Mrs. Gibbs and Giles shook their grey old heads together, and wondered whether Sir Richard was aware how long the young man had been in the house already. The truth was that it scarcely occurred to him that Noel *was* a young man. He was thoughtful and intelligent, and Thomasina had so openly deplored the deficiencies of her education, deficiencies which Mr. Edward Noel had been good enough to promise to supply, that Sir Richard was content to regard him in the light of a discreet and elderly tutor. He could not indeed see any necessity for so much learning, but the child had many lonely hours to pass away in the great, desolate house, and she could not employ them more innocently. Thomasina was therefore satisfied that she was acting with her grandfather's sanction and approval, and especially

since her culture was rather in the direction of poetry than of politics. Edward Noel was a good reader, and she listened with rapt attention to the passages he selected from the poems of Shelley and Keats, always telling her, with the almost paternal care which is very entrancing to a young girl, that they were not authors whose works he could advise her to read for herself. On one occasion he brought a book too modern to have found its way into the library at the Chase—the poems of a young and still unknown author named Alfred Tennyson. He left the volume in Thomasina's keeping, and seemed unwilling to receive it again at her hands, although she did not return it until she had conned her favourite poems again and again, and especially those lines which had been scored by Noel's pencil.

Mary Bertram would probably have been more clear-sighted than Sir Richard if she

had been allowed to watch the progress of the intimacy, but she was at the time shut out from intercourse with the great house. The children had been ill, and Sir Richard, much more alive to the risk of infection from measles or from scarlet fever than from love, forbade Thomasina to go to the cottage, or even to see her father when he came to Bertram's Chase. Even when the doctor had declared that the children were recovering from influenza, and that there was nothing more to fear, Sir Richard observed that it was best to err on the safe side and to keep away from them for a few days longer; but he graciously added that he should not object to Mary's visiting the Chase, and on one sunny morning in December Anthony persuaded her to walk up with him. While Anthony repaired to his father's business room, Mary found her way to the library, and she was a little startled to find that

Thomasina was not alone at that early hour. She and Mr. Noel were sitting on the same great sofa, surrounded by a goodly pile of volumes.

‘Oh, Polly! how glad I am to see you,’ said Thomasina, and the colour which flushed into her temples may have been due only to her satisfaction. ‘It is such an immense time since we have met.’

‘Not since the evening we met Mr. Noel at dinner,’ said Polly, shaking hands with him.

‘Which seems almost a lifetime ago,’ added Noel in a low voice to Thomasina, and she too felt that she had lived in a fuller sense than ever before in the last few weeks. Although Mary did not catch the words, the tone in which they were spoken did not fall on an unheeding ear, and she also noted Thomasina’s answering smile and blush. She began to think that she had been unneces-

sarily prudent in poor Robin's case, and that he might have been allowed to enjoy his long leave at home without risking Thomasina's happiness by entangling her in a precipitate engagement.

'And how are the children—my beloved Tom in particular?' said Thomasina. 'Mr. Noel does not know all that life has to give until he has made Tom's acquaintance.'

'Then I must enlarge my experience without delay,' said Noel. 'I was not fortunate enough to find Mrs. Bertram at home when I called.'

'I was at home, but I could not see anyone while the children were so ill,' said Mary; 'they are almost well again, and I hope, Thomasina, that you will soon be able to come and see us.'

'I am able and willing now,' replied Thomasina, 'only I cannot disabuse Sir Richard's mind of the idea that it is dangerous. I am

very much inclined to walk back with you now, and when it is an accomplished fact he will take it calmly.'

Mary, however, refused to sanction such insubordination, and, since she was unable to divest herself of the belief that her presence was unwelcome, she rejoiced in the shortness of her husband's interview with Sir Richard, and was quite ready to return home with him.

'I should like to know Mrs. Bertram better,' said Edward Noel when they were gone. Since their reading had been interrupted he was not disposed to resume it.

'She is worth knowing,' said Thomasina emphatically; 'there is more good in her little finger than in my whole body.'

'Really?' said Noel, smiling; 'I will not insult you by assuming that you wish to be contradicted.'

'Such a contradiction would be false and

absurd. Mary's goodness is a quality to be felt, but not defined, and I admire her all the more because we are so unlike.'

'We do not need to be all made on one pattern,' said Edward Noel, who did not in truth believe that there was anything in nature nearer perfection than the woman at his side.

'If we were all nearer to Polly's pattern it would be better,' replied Thomasina; 'she is so well balanced. I think that is what I admire most in her.'

'I know what you mean. But has she not found her *assiette*, as a Frenchman might say, in a happy marriage? Perhaps Mrs. Bertram might confess to Bohemian tendencies in her youth.'

'That is what people say,' rejoined Thomasina, remembering Robin's saying to the same effect. He had not indeed used the same expression, since the word Bohemian

would have had no meaning for him except as a geographical term, but the sentiment was identical. 'But Polly is unchanged by marriage, and I am sure that I shall never settle down to everyday life with her placid content.'

'Then after all, Miss Bertram, your ideal does not satisfy you?'

'Yes, it does. I am not so inconsistent as you think. I am dissatisfied with my own restless nature, and I should like to be as Polly, because she fulfils her ideal.'

'If you fulfil your own ideal, you will satisfy others,' said Noel earnestly, too earnestly, Thomasina thought. She laid her hand on the volume of Milton, with which they had been engaged when they were interrupted by Mary's visit, and asked whether they should not finish *Lycidas* before luncheon.

Anthony and Mary had also talked over



the pair they left behind. Mary was less disposed to be reserved about Thomasina's new flirtation than she had been in Robin's case, and she remarked on her surprise at finding Mr. Noel so entirely at home at the Chase.

'I do not know whether he is often there,' said Anthony rather absently; 'but Lady Camden said something about it when I met her the other day, and I have come across him once or twice.'

'He was reading aloud to Thomasina when I came in.'

'Thomasina used to like me to read to her very much,' observed Anthony.

'Yes, dear; but do you think that is quite the same thing?'

'I dare say that she does not care for the same books. How fast the years go by! It seems but the other day that I read to her nearly all the Waverley Novels, and the

“Spy” and the “Pilot,” and soon perhaps I shall be reading them to Dick.’

‘But you do not understand, dear Anthony,’ said Mary, too anxious about Thomasina to be diverted from her purpose by the prospect of Dick’s satisfaction; ‘surely it is imprudent to allow Mr. Noel to spend whole mornings alone with Thomasina, reading poetry to her. Do you think that Sir Richard is aware of it?’

‘I should think he must know it,’ replied Anthony; ‘and, at all events, he is so jealous of what he considers my interference with Thomasina that I could scarcely speak to him on the subject. If you think her imprudent, you might give her a hint.’

Mary knew so well the difficult relations between father and son that she would not urge Anthony to take any action in the matter, but she was equally aware that Thomasina had been too deeply offended by her interference

before to brook it on a second occasion. She said doubtfully that to speak prematurely might do more harm than to allow matters to take their course.

‘So I think,’ said Anthony, ever ready to approve of inaction. ‘I understand Lady Camden’s dark hints now, but of course she is prejudiced by her views for Sir Harry, and I am sure that we may trust to Thomasina’s good sense to keep her out of mischief. Besides, I like the little I have seen of Noel.’

‘No one can help liking him,’ said Mary; ‘the danger is that Thomasina may like him too well. Do you believe that Sir Richard would sanction their engagement?’

‘Oh, I cannot think it at all likely to come to that,’ said Anthony, startled by the liveliness of his wife’s imagination. ‘I do not think that would do at all. It would be very hard on Sir Harry to see his cousin step in before him—a man of small means and no

position in the county, and on the wrong side in politics. I am certain that Sir Richard would never hear of it.'

'Then, Anthony, if you see your way to putting a stop to the readings in the library, it ought to be done.' Anthony, however, did not see his way to it, and he took some pains to remain in ignorance of the frequency of Edward Noel's visits, lest his mind might be disturbed to no purpose.

## CHAPTER V.

CHRISTMAS was at hand, and often as Edward Noel had hovered on the brink of a declaration of love the words still faltered on his tongue, for there was something in Thomasina's manner which had always held him back. Her quick response to every look and tone was exchanged for coldness and reserve when he said a word which might be construed into any expression of the passion which possessed his soul; and yet he felt that, however she might shrink from the final decision, she had evinced her preference for his society in every possible way. On his part he knew that it was impossible to understand her more perfectly or to love her more entirely, and, since it would be unmanly to

leave Marston Abbas without daring his fate, the day came when he rode up the avenue at the Chase with a settled purpose to know the best or worst which life had to give him.

Thomasina sat alone in the library, and, when she looked up, she said involuntarily, 'You look quite chilled, Mr. Noel. I am afraid that you have had a cold ride.'

'I do not think that it is cold,' said Noel, but he sat down and drew his chair into the fire before he spoke again. 'I have been wondering, Miss Bertram, whether this was to be my last visit to the room in which I have spent so many happy hours.'

'Are you going away for Christmas?' said Thomasina, annoyed by the consciousness that her voice trembled a little.

'My married sister expects me; I am not a man with many ties, and it is considered discreditable not to join a family party at Christmas.'

‘There is such cant and conventionalism in the English way of keeping Christmas,’ observed Thomasina ; ‘why should people be more affectionate, and show their affection by over-eating themselves, at Christmas more than at any other time of year ? Our household is disorganised for a fortnight by the amount of beef and pudding which it is considered necessary to consume in the servants’ hall.’

Mr. Noel was not to be diverted from the matter in hand into a dissertation on the proper mode of keeping Christmas. ‘I suppose I shall go to church in the morning, and eat the inevitable square inch of pudding, if this is cant and conventionalism ; I should class it among the accidents of life, which will not distort my moral nature.’

‘Now you are laughing at me for being exaggerative,’ said Thomasina.

‘No, Miss Bertram ; I was never less

disposed to laugh. Let them laugh that win. My heart is sick with the fear that I am about to lose all which can make my life worth living. Do not let us talk of things indifferent when my soul burns with the words which I have so long restrained. I am comparatively a poor man; I am fully aware of my own presumption—'

'You must think meanly of me if you believe that so base a thing as money could come between us,' said Thomasina. 'But let us leave the rest unsaid; we shall be friends, dear friends if you will, always.'

'I call Heaven to witness,' exclaimed Noel, with a vehemence by which Thomasina was almost terrified, 'that from the day we first met my soul has revolted against so cold a word as friendship.'

'Then I have made a terrible mistake, Mr. Noel. I thought that you cared for me only as I intended to care for you.'



‘True, as you *intended*,’ said he; ‘say that you are taken by surprise, and that you have begun to suspect, ever so slightly, that friendship between man and woman is only another word for love, and I will wait—not patiently, indeed, but still I will wait—with that glimmer of hope.’

‘I do not, I cannot, bid you hope,’ said Thomasina with increasing agitation, which Noel could not but construe as a favourable sign. He waited in vain for some further communication, and then said slowly,

‘Then I have had my answer?’

‘All the answer that I have to give.’

‘Say plainly, such an answer as a vain, presumptuous fool has a right to expect,’ said Noel, maddened by the bitterness of his disappointment.

‘You are harsh and unkind to me,’ said Thomasina, raising her tearful eyes for the first time to his face. ‘We have been so

happy together for the last few weeks, and I little thought that when you came in it was to end it all.'

'I came with a very different intention, Miss Bertram; I hoped to prolong the feverish joy that is past into the settled happiness of a lifetime. It is you who have driven me out, a crushed and disappointed man.'

'I have not forbidden you to come again,' said Thomasina in a very low voice, which was, however, distinct enough to bring light into her lover's eyes. The words seemed to him to convey a permission to try his fate at some future time.

'Then I shall come—not to-morrow, nor perhaps for many weeks. I will come when I can bear to see you before the eyes of others, although the hours we have passed together are to be as though they had never been.'

‘You cannot forgive the wrong I have done to you?’ said Thomasina, clasping her hands together.

‘Forgiveness would be out of place. I know that a great disaster has come upon me; I know too that no other man will love you as I do. But I do not say that I have suffered any wrong; I can only submit.’

He rose as if to go, and Thomasina said timidly, ‘Shall I let Sir Richard know? he will think it strange if you leave Marston Abbas without seeing him again.’

‘True,’ said Noel, again possessed by a sanguine spirit; for why should Thomasina feel sufficient interest in his fate to care for his incurring the displeasure of Sir Richard? ‘I will stay till he comes in. But do not let me disturb you.’

He threw himself into a chair, and took up a book with a pretence of reading, while Thomasina, unable any longer to endure the

situation, fairly ran out of the room. She went upstairs and hid her tears and blushes from the light of day in the privacy of her own chamber. Truly this man loved her. 'He loves me,' she repeated over and over to herself, as if amid her shame and self-reproach the words had a music of their own. She tried to think of Robin, of his summer-day's courtship, of the politic injustice by which, as she considered, his suit had been interrupted ; but, instead of Robin's fair, boyish face, the image of the moody, disappointed man whom she had just rejected still rose up before her. She was conscious of having trifled with his deeper feelings by encouraging the pleasant intimacy which she had resolved should lead to no results, and although he had disclaimed the sense of injury, she felt that it was there, and that he might try to stifle his passion in just resentment. Had he not said that if they were to meet again, they must meet with

the distant coldness of ordinary acquaintance? There had indeed been a terrible mistake, but it lay in rejecting, not in encouraging, the love of one whom she knew to be worthy. Now, however, the thing was done, and pride must sustain her, in spite of her misgivings whether it were done well.

Thomasina washed away the traces of tears, and smoothed her ruffled hair, and went downstairs when the gong sounded for luncheon with perfect self-possession, which was not outwardly shaken by finding Noel in the dining-room. He condemned his own weakness in staying, and found the task of feigning unconcern more arduous than she appeared to do. Sir Richard, however, was not sufficiently quick-sighted to notice more than Noel's natural regret in leaving a house which he had been encouraged to frequent. 'So you are to lose your playfellow?' he said to Thomasina.

‘ Yes, grandfather,’ she replied steadily.

‘ And where do you go next, Noel ? ’

‘ I am going to stay with a married sister, Sir Richard. The parsonage is poky, and the children are riotous, and I do not profoundly admire my brother-in-law’s sermons. But I suppose that I shall enjoy it after a fashion.’

‘ You do not seem to look forward to much enjoyment, however,’ said Sir Richard. ‘ Would you like better to spend your Christmas week with us ? Anthony and his wife and family are coming into the house for a week, so there will be enough of children’s noise and plenty of room to put it away.’

Mr. Noel could not reply without one rapid glance at Thomasina. A word, a look, even a blush, would have been enough to decide him, but she was composedly eating her cutlet, without raising her eyes. ‘ No, thank you, Sir Richard,’ he said ; ‘ it is very good of you to ask me, but my sister expects

me, and I should only be in the way.' Then Thomasina felt that she had thrown away her last chance.

Noel rose at once, leaving his luncheon untasted and making his excuses to Sir Richard, since he said that he had other visits to pay. He came round to the side of the table where Thomasina sat ; their hands met for a moment, and, though he was speechless, she bade him good-bye in no faltering tones. As he left the room he told himself that she was callous and cold-hearted, for he was too sore at heart to be reasonable, and was unable to suppose that she might be acting a part for his sake as well as for her own. As it was, the sagacious Giles was able to assure Mrs. Gibbs that matters had come to a '*cris-sis*,' for Mr. Noel went off without so much as tasting the glass of sherry he had just poured out, and his young lady never touched a morsel after he left the room,

After this life flowed on within its old banks, and Thomasina fulfilled those Christmas usages which she had denounced as conventional. She dispensed the Bertram charities, and provided the dinners for gentle and simple; she laid in a store of toys for her small brothers, and led the revels round such a bowl of fiery raisins as surpassed Dick's glowing anticipations of the glory of snapdragons. It was at dinner on Christmas Day that Mary Bertram first learned, with a feeling of surprise, that Edward Noel had not only left Marston Abbas, but had taken away his horses, and was not expected to return. Thomasina was stung by the enquiring glance Mary involuntarily directed towards her, and even more by the haste with which it was withdrawn as soon as their eyes met. Sir Richard kept up the old custom of drinking healths on Christmas Day, and when it came to Thomasina's turn to propose a toast,



she named 'Robin Windsor and all who are absent.' Mary flushed with a sensation at once of joy and pain; her thoughts were also with Robin, who, if he had not been ensnared by the charms of Thomasina, would assuredly have been spending his Christmas at home, and she felt that he could not have spoken the name of the woman he loved, if indeed he had spoken it at all, without a tenderness and tremour which found no place in Thomasina's defiant hardness of tone. And, in truth, while Thomasina strove to work herself up into a fictitious interest in her first lover, her thoughts were not disposed to range further than the parsonage in which Edward Noel was submitting with wearied resignation to the attentions of his sister, who was swayed between her anxiety to make the house pleasant to her distinguished brother and her unwillingness to check the riotous mirth of her four school-boys.

One of the great meets of the year always took place at Bertram's Chase a day or two after Christmas. Thomasina did the honours of the breakfast and rode with Sir Richard to see the first cover drawn, and did her part with her accustomed grace and spirit. For the first time for many weeks Sir Harry Camden rode by her side with a beaming face; he had heard that his cousin had left the neighbourhood, and his instinct told him that he did not go triumphant. Under her grandfather's roof, and even in his park, Thomasina felt the obligations of good breeding, and she submitted passively to his attentions, until Sir Harry was sufficiently ill-advised to draw attention to the one point in which he could claim superiority to his rival.

'I shall enjoy a good run to-day,' he said; 'my pleasure this season has been quite spoiled by looking after Edward Noel. It seemed so probable that he would break his neck before the day was over.'

‘Indeed,’ said Thomasina with a flash of scorn, which she was at no pains to conceal; ‘I suppose that it was with the view of sparing you such an arduous task Mr. Noel preferred spending several hunting days at the Chase.’

‘Hunting is not in his line,’ said Sir Harry; ‘it remains to be seen whether he is more successful in electioneering. I hear that Parliament must certainly be dissolved in February.’

‘Mr. Noel is one of those men who is unlikely to fail in anything that he undertakes,’ said Thomasina, and then she blushed to think of the construction her words might bear. Sir Harry had implied a knowledge of the motives which had brought him to Marston Abbas; did she wish him also to understand that his suit was not unsuccessful?

## CHAPTER VI.

POLITICS had been allowed to remain in the background during Edward Noel's winter visits to the Chase, and, in spite of Lady Camden's dark insinuations that he was a dangerous man, Sir Richard had been unable to see that his opinions differed materially from those of his associates. But when Parliament was dissolved, and it was tolerably well known that the Corn Laws were to be the question of the day, party spirit ran high, and convulsed the rural districts to a degree which can hardly be comprehended at a day when the points at issue are for the most part only interesting to the educated classes of society. Many foolish and intemperate things were said and done on both sides, but

an impartial posterity will probably declare that the folly of the country party weighed down the scale. A man who was suspected of an inclination towards the principles of free trade was denounced as a traitor to his country and an enemy to his country neighbour, and there were middle-aged squires, sane and sober-minded on other points, who relieved their feelings and expressed their abhorrence for the Manchester school of politicians by abjuring the use of cotton stockings, and exhibiting to their sympathising friends the bare ancles which were inserted in their boots, as a proof of their desire to injure the trade of cotton-spinning.

Sir Richard's wrath was therefore great, and expressed in no measured terms, when he learned that Noel was contesting a borough in an adjoining county on free-trade principles, with every prospect of success. The last member, who had given a silent vote on the

right side for the last five-and-twenty years, was generally thought to have a vested interest in the seat, and Sir Richard declared that it was a scandalous thing to call upon his old friend Wilmot to defend his principles and his seat from the attacks of a young puppy, who was in his cradle when Wilmot was first elected for the borough. The 'County Chronicle,' which so judiciously echoed or formulated the sentiments of the country gentlemen, took the same view of the enormity of such an offence. Noel's electioneering speeches were reported at full length, interspersed with notices of groans and hooting, and 'the late worthy member's' short and pathetic appeal to the better feelings of his misguided constituents was decorated with enthusiastic applause, while the whole was summed up in a furious leading article, declaiming against the weak and arrogant man who presumed to disturb the settled convic-

tions of the nation, and hinting that the worthy baronet whose hospitality he had lately enjoyed must regret that he had been led to cherish such a viper in his bosom.

‘That is very well put,’ said Sir Richard, who had put on his spectacles on purpose to read the paragraph to Thomasina. ‘Which baronet do they mean, me or Sir Harry?’

‘Oh, Sir Harry of course,’ said Thomasina quickly, for she was unwilling to believe that Noel’s frequent visits to the Chase had been a matter of county notoriety; ‘not that the Camdens distinguished themselves by their hospitality to Mr. Noel. The article is almost spiteful and impertinent enough to have been written by Lady Camden herself.’

‘I do not know what you mean by “spiteful and impertinent,” Thomasina; they let the fellow off more easily than he deserves. If the Camdens saw less of him than we did, it is a proof of their good sense, and he had

better not come here again, for I shall tell Giles to shut the door in his face.'

'If you do,' said Thomasina hotly, 'I shall take the first opportunity of shaking hands with him before all the world, and I shall tell him how deeply I regret that party spirit should allow you to forget how one gentleman ought to behave to another.'

Sir Richard took the retort calmly, as he was in the habit of taking Thomasina's impetuous sayings. 'Depend upon it,' said he, 'the scoundrel will not show his face here again; his own conscience will tell him what I think of his rascally doings.'

'Now you are beginning to swear and use bad language, and I shall go and dine and sleep at the cottage,' said Thomasina.

'Upon my soul I did not swear,' said Sir Richard, quite ready to deny the imputation with an oath, 'though it would provoke a saint to hear you speak up for such a rascal.'



And you will not gain anything by going to the cottage, for Anthony says that it is a monstrous thing to try and turn out Wilmot. He and Anthony were at school together.'

'I know that they were at school together, grandfather. That may be a reason why Mr. Wilmot should call me by my Christian name and want to kiss me when we meet, though I think it a great impertinence; but it can be no reason why an incompetent man should be returned to Parliament. I do not believe that he ever made a speech in his life.'

'My dear Thomasina,' said Sir Richard solemnly, 'it is Wilmot and such as Wilmot who are the salvation of the country—men who always vote on the right side, without caring to give their reasons.'

'Men who do not give their reasons, because they have not got any,' rejoined Thomasina, 'whose only principle in life is that

"it always was so." As if *that* could be called a reason! And Mr. Noel comes forward to brave scorn and obloquy, because he believes that the interests of the country are at stake.'

If a tithe of such heretical sentiments had been uttered by Anthony, Sir Richard would have disinherited him on the spot. As they were spoken by Thomasina, he contented himself with nourishing his wrath against Edward Noel for having misled her by his pernicious doctrine. Certainly, he said to himself, the 'County Chronicle' had good reason to declare that he had nourished a viper in his bosom.

Thomasina, on her part, when the heat of the argument was over, felt a little remorseful for having presumed so far on Sir Richard's forbearance. She remembered some advice which Noel had given her on the necessity of respecting the prejudices of the old, and

she was more than usually tender and gentle in her relations with her grandfather that evening, even proposing to read aloud from the pages of the obnoxious 'Chronicle.' But Sir Richard answered wearily that he did not want to be bothered with politics; no doubt the country was going to pieces, but he supposed that it would last his time. He and Thomasina played one rubber of piquet and two of backgammon, and ended the evening in an amicable manner.

The issue of the contest was still doubtful when Anthony one morning joined Thomasina in the library instead of going first to his father's room. 'I am come to ask you to go down to the cottage this morning,' he said. 'Mary is not well.'

'Oh, yes! I will go at once. There is nothing really amiss, I hope?' said Thomasina, startled by her father's manner.

'No,' said Anthony, hesitating and ap-

parently relieved by receiving a peremptory summons to attend Sir Richard in his room. The old man never omitted an opportunity of recalling him to a sense of his duties, even if he had nothing more important to say than that one of the park gates was hanging on its hinges. 'I must not keep Sir Richard waiting, and, in case he should detain me, you had better walk down to the cottage alone. Mary will tell you about it.'

'You never were so mysterious before,' said Thomasina with a smile, and yet her curiosity was stimulated by anxiety and the belief that it was necessary to break the news to her of some fresh enormity perpetrated by Mr. Noel. In very few minutes she was walking briskly down the woodland path which led to her father's house, not too uneasy to enjoy the brightness of the sunshine, the delicious foretaste of spring in the balmy air, and the clear blue sky, all flecked and

barred with fleecy clouds. The primroses had just begun to peep from underneath their wrinkled leaves, and the hazel catkins hung their golden tassels on every bush. The sights and sounds of early spring are ever associated with childhood, and Thomasina's idle speculations about Noel were soon lost in the recollection of her early rides to the cottage in the days when Mary was her governess and not her stepmother. She thought also of Robin Windsor and of the feeling of good-fellowship with which she had then regarded him, a feeling which she could recall with more unalloyed pleasure than the softer sentiment which succeeded to it.

Uneasiness had almost died out of her mind before she reached the cottage ; perhaps Anthony had been fussy about his wife's headaches, or Mary herself had been too much disturbed by the misdemeanours of one of the servants. But when the parlour-maid

opened the door with a tear-stained face, and barely answered to her agitated enquiry that the children were quite well, then Thomasina felt that some great calamity had fallen on the household, and ran hastily up to Mary's bedroom. Mary sat alone and unoccupied, and she turned away and hid her face when Thomasina entered.

‘Polly, dear Polly! what has happened?’ cried Thomasina, throwing herself at her feet and pressing to her lips the cold hand which hung listlessly down.

‘We had a letter this morning; cannot you guess whom it concerns, who is dear to us both?’ said Mary, and Thomasina turned sick and pale as she divined the truth and faltered Robin's name.

‘Yes, dear,’ said Mary, ‘Robin is dead. The news came to the Admiralty last night, and Admiral Burton wrote to tell us. He was shot through the heart when he was

sent up one of the rivers in command of a boat.'

For some minutes there was silence, a silence which allowed the two women, as they sat side by side, to hear the ticking of their watches, to feel the beating of their hearts. At last Thomasina gasped out the words in low and broken accents, 'Oh, poor Polly!'

Before she spoke Mary had felt that however the blow might fall on Thomasina, her loss was slight compared with that of the sister who had loved him for all the twenty years of his short life; yet now the words of pity grated harshly on her overwrought feelings, and she said with a touch of bitterness, 'Is it, then, nothing to you, Thomasina?'

'It is much,' said Thomasina, as her tears slowly rose and fell. 'I always liked him when he was a boy, and when he came back the other day, so good and affectionate and

true-hearted, I liked him better still. You know, Polly, that I found it hard to forgive you for sending him away without even wishing me good-bye.'

'I shall never forgive myself,' said Mary. 'I see now that it was a needless caution; he might have been allowed for a little while to cherish the attachment which you would not have encouraged him to declare. I feared lest his eagerness would hurry him into a declaration which must have vexed Anthony and deeply offended Sir Richard; and your manner was misleading, Thomasina. I thought that you were beginning to love him.'

'For the second time,' said Thomasina, 'it is brought home to me that I am a heartless flirt. I wished him to like me, and thought much of the pleasure of being with him; but I did not look forward until it flashed across me that you had been watching us and told him he must go. Then I was angry that you



should have come between us, and I felt that I might have loved him.'

'Robin too was angry,' said Mary; 'his new-born love estranged him from me, who had loved him with all my heart since he was a child in his cradle. We parted coldly, and my mother wrote that he had come home unlike himself—restless and moody and only anxious to get to sea again. He had written one letter home, affectionate as ever, and in it he sent his love to Polly. That is all the comfort I have now; his anger could never last long, and I think it meant that I was forgiven.' Her voice broke down, and Thomasina could only cry with her. If Robin had been her betrothed lover, if she had ever loved him with true and single-hearted affection, she felt that the shock of hearing of his death would have been tolerable compared with the mingled shame and remorse which she experienced in the conviction that

his young life had been sacrificed to an idle sentiment.

‘After a while,’ said Mary, with greater calmness, ‘I shall forget the little cloud which came between us and think of him as he ever was—tender, and true, and brave. Admiral Burton had a private letter from Captain Ellis, in which he writes that, although it was so short a time since Robin had joined his ship, he had won all hearts. The common sailors cried like women when his body was brought on deck, and begged for a lock of his hair, or even a shred of his clothes, as a keepsake. One little midshipman was nearly heart-broken. You know how good Robin was to those who were younger or in any way weaker than himself.’

‘I know it: that was why he was good to me,’ said Thomasina. ‘And now, Polly, I must ask if you can forgive the thoughtless vanity which has been the means of leading him to his

death. I loved him—now that he is dead I may say that I loved him dearly—but if I had not been vain and frivolous, I should never have encouraged him to think of any closer tie than that of our childish friendship.'

'Let us each bear our own share of blame,' said Polly. 'I shall find it easier to forgive your imprudence than my excess of caution. It may be that my dear Robin is with us now, and knows that, whatever cause of difference there has been between us, we are one in our sorrow and mourning. Poor mother! the blow will fall hardest upon her, and I cannot be with her.'

'You can and ought to go to her,' said Thomasina eagerly. 'If you and Anthony will go to-day, I can make it all right with Sir Richard and take the children back to the Chase with me. Then I shall feel that I am doing something for you.'

Mary demurred at first, and Anthony

was always slow to move ; but Thomasina's energy prevailed. She looked out the trains and left Mary to complete her preparations while she returned to the Chase to take Sir Richard by storm, and secure Anthony's leave of absence, while his compassion for Robin's untimely death was still fresh in his mind. Three hours afterwards Mr. and Mrs. Bertram were on their way to the station, their children were installed in the nurseries at the Chase, and Thomasina had leisure to analyse her own sensations now that the sting of Mary's desolating grief was withdrawn from her immediate presence.

## CHAPTER VII.

UNDERLYING her sincere grief for Robin's death there lurked a feeling of relief in Thomasina's heart that the imaginary barrier which she had raised between herself and Edward Noel was swept away. She was just sufficiently conscious of it to reproach herself for cruelty and hardness of heart, and to put the thought from her while she sedulously nursed her sorrow for Robin. She put on such mourning as the half-relationship entitled her to wear, and she encouraged Sir Richard's expressions of regret over the early death of the sailor lad whom he had liked so well, and who was, as he said, made of the same stuff as the brave boys who used to flock into the navy for the sake of fighting under

Nelson's flag. They lived very quietly at this time, Thomasina devoting herself to the children, and such communication as they had with the outer world chiefly consisted in the scraps of political news which Sir Richard brought back from the market town. One afternoon he came into the library, where Thomasina was sitting with Tom on her knee and Dick by her side, listening with round-eyed attention to the story of the Three Bears.

‘ Well, Thomasina,’ said Sir Richard, and his face was red and his voice hoarse with agitation, ‘ you have got your own way, as you generally do. That fellow Noel is elected without a contest; Wilmot's agents said that he had not a shadow of a chance, so he settled not to go to the poll to be pelted with rotten eggs by Noel's hired ruffians.’

‘ How can you say anything so wickedly unjust ?’ said Thomasina, with at least equal

excitement, and Tom slipped off her knee and retreated with his brother into the bay window. They had a dim belief that the grandfather whom they had been taught to revere was the original ogre of fairy tales, and, when he spoke so very gruffly, they naturally expected that 'I smell child's flesh' would be his next utterance.

'It is true, every word of it,' said Sir Richard; 'everyone on the bench was open-mouthed about the sedition he has talked and the rabble who are always at his heels. Sir Harry Camden says that he is ashamed to own him for his cousin.'

'Then I shall be ashamed to own Sir Harry for an acquaintance. I shall take great care not to know him next time we meet.'

'If you talk such nonsense, Thomasina, I will ask Sir Harry to dinner to-morrow.'

'That is a terrible threat indeed, grand-

father ; but, after all, I shall not much mind it if you will ask Mr. Noel to meet him, and then you will be able to determine which is the better man.'

' You may take my word for it,' said Sir Richard, 'that Noel will never darken these doors again.'

Then the rich colour which had flushed into Thomasina's face faded as suddenly. She knew, and the knowledge came home to her with the flash of sudden conviction, that her future life was bound up in the hope of seeing Edward Noel again. As that hope grew fainter her longing for the opportunity to unsay her rash refusal grew more intense. There was not a distant figure in the avenue, nor a strange voice in the hall, which her fancy had not invested with some resemblance to the form and voice of her rejected lover, and when she tried to smile at the delusion the smile was quenched in tears of the



bitterest disappointment. To her pining desire for his presence was now added the fear lest he should be received with insults if he came; for she did not doubt that Sir Richard was prepared to execute his threat, and even suspected that Giles had already received orders to deny admission to Mr. Noel. Such a fear carried her to the window whenever she heard the sounds of an arrival, and prompted her to wander restlessly round the approaches to the house, with an anxious desire to intercept him if indeed he came. But days passed on and Edward Noel came not; he had judged wisely if he wished to strengthen his hold on her affections, for her heart became more wholly his now that she suspected that he had become indifferent to its possession.

Although Thomasina was tender and good to the children, she was glad when their parents returned home, because their prattle

oppressed and wearied her, and yet when they were gone she was even more, oppressed by the silence and loneliness of the great house. Sir Richard noticed her dejection without understanding its cause; he bought a new horse for her, and insisted that she should go out more often with Anthony now that he was becoming unable to ride fast or far. Thomasina acquiesced with submissive indifference, but she took no pleasure in the gift, and Sir Richard grew irritable in his sadness when he saw that the light of his old age was quenched in gloom.

Mary and Anthony saw less distinctly that something was amiss, but they were powerless to amend the relations between the two. Once or twice Mary overcame her reluctance to speak of Robin, in the belief that some secret grief connected with him lurked in Thomasina's breast, and she was confirmed in this belief when Thomasina turned from

the subject almost defiantly. But the old servants of the household guessed the truth more nearly, and one afternoon, about a month after Mrs. Bertram's return, Mrs. Gibbs announced her intention of walking down to the cottage with an offering of the first cream-cheese of the season. She was fully aware of her own condescension in carrying the cheese herself, wrapped in a napkin, since she had never been able to regard Mary, who as Polly Windsor had been unquestionably her inferior, as more than her equal when she was promoted to become Mrs. Bertram. Nor was Mary insensible of the honour done to her; she was as grateful to Mrs. Gibbs for the cream-cheese as if it had been her own offering and not the produce of Sir Richard's dairy, and she invited Mrs. Gibbs to sit down and rest after her fatiguing walk. Mrs. Gibbs did sit down, and presently became confidential. She was one who always

kept to her station, but she thought that she was only doing her duty in mentioning that she and Mr. Giles were quite distressed about Miss Bertram. Mr. Giles could testify that Miss Bertram did not eat her meals with a healthy appetite and sat up late at night, for he saw a light in her window long after Sir Richard was gone to bed. Indeed, Mrs. Gibbs saw a great change in her young lady's ways about the house; she had written the same dinner on the slate two days running, and she took no interest in the new chintz with which they were furnishing the south bedrooms. Probably Mrs. Bertram was not aware how last winter Mr. Noel and her young lady were reading together in the library for days upon days, and since, as Mr. Giles had told her, that gentleman had turned out so badly, no doubt Miss Bertram was fretting about him. Mrs. Gibbs never had any opinion of 'male tutors, nor indeed

of female ones neither,' she added under her breath, but this was only a parenthetical allusion to her old feud with Thomasina's governesses.

When Mary had expressed her conviction that all the Bertram family must be grateful to so kind and valued a servant for the interest she took in their welfare, and had promised to talk the matter over with Mr. Bertram, Mrs. Gibbs made a magnificent curtsy, and went home to declare that Mrs. Bertram was quite the lady, a distinction which she had not always been disposed to accord to her. And Mary was really grateful, although if Thomasina had guessed that the secret which she believed to be safely locked within her breast had been discussed in all its bearings in the housekeeper's room, it would scarcely have modified her belief that all the world was out of joint.

Since Anthony's mind was slow to move,

he looked distressed and puzzled by his wife's report of Mrs. Gibbs' visit. 'I have noticed, since you told me to watch her, that Thomasina was out of spirits,' he said; 'but I never thought of Noel. Did you not tell me, at the time you heard of poor Robin's death, that you feared that there had been something between him and Thomasina?'

'It was a mistaken belief,' said Mary hurriedly, 'a mistake at least as far as Thomasina was concerned. She may have been a little flattered by his admiration, but that was all. Do not let us talk of it,' she added shivering, and indeed it remained for years to come a page in life's history to which she could not bear to turn.

'Let us talk of Thomasina, however,' said Anthony, 'if we must follow Mrs. Gibbs' lead, although I do not see how she is to know what the child thinks of Noel. I am

very loth to believe that there is anything in it. Her marriage with such a man is quite out of the question. Sir Richard would not hear of it, and indeed I should be quite averse to such a connection myself.' But his own opinion was, as Anthony was aware, of very secondary importance.

'Mrs Gibbs' surmises would go for little unless they tallied with other things. But you must remember, Anthony, that I was startled by the intimacy which had sprung up between them when I saw them together in the library, and if Thomasina already liked him, the fact of his being opposed to Sir Richard in politics would not induce her to give him up.'

'She must give him up,' said Anthony decidedly. 'Sir Richard will never consent to such a marriage; she will have to get over her fancy.'

Mary might have reminded him that such

advice had been given to her five years ago, and had not been followed by signal success ; but a few happy years of married life are apt to eclipse the halo of romance in which it commenced, and she was quite ready to consider such inconstancy as not only possible but commendable in Thomasina's case. However, as she remarked, the unvaried tenour of the life at Bertram's Chase was ill adapted to bring forgetfulness of a thwarted attachment. It would be well for her to leave home for a while, and, amid different scenes and associations, she might forget Edward Noel, so Mary thought with a shade of bitterness, almost as easily as she had forgotten her earlier interest in Robin Windsor.

As usual Anthony foresaw difficulties from Sir Richard. He never liked Thomasina to be absent from him, and any suspicion of the real reason why change was



desirable for her would make him quite unmanageable. 'Of course he must not suspect it,' said Mary, with a woman's ready tact; 'but he is already uneasy about Thomasina's health, and he might be induced to let her go away for a little while. Do you not think that Aunt Thomasina might arrange it if you gave her a hint as to the real state of things?'

Anthony acted on this last suggestion, and did give Mrs. Grey a hint, after the manner in which hints are given by obtuse men. He wrote to inform her that they were all uneasy about Thomasina, who was out of health and spirits, and he hoped that his aunt would invite her to spend a fortnight in Chesterfield Street, and would obtain Sir Richard's consent to the proposal. He received a laconic answer by return of post:—

'MY DEAR ANTHONY,—I have written to ask Sir Richard to send up Thomasina, or to

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bring her himself if he will not part with her. Of course she has got into some scrape. I knew that she would, sooner or later, but I daresay that I shall be able to set her to rights.                   Your affectionate Aunt,

‘ THOMASINA GREY.’

Mrs. Grey's letter to Sir Richard was equally, or perhaps more concise, for she omitted any reference to the supposed scrape, and only hoped that Sir Richard could spare or accompany Thomasina on a fortnight's visit to town. Anthony had tried to pave the way for the request by remarking on Thomasina's languid health and spirits, and suggesting that she would be better for change of air, and Sir Richard had met the suggestion by an angry contradiction. Now, however, he read and re-read the note before he threw it across the table to Thomasina, saying,

‘ If you care to go, my dear, I daresay

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that I could spare you for a fortnight. You do not look as well as I like to see you, and though I do not hold with the modern notion that everyone is better for change of air, there would be no harm in trying it. In my opinion it is only restlessness which makes the doctors recommend change; we never heard of it till the railways were made.'

'It is so like Aunt Thomasina to write and order me to be consigned to her as if I were a bale of goods. And there is nothing at all the matter with me,' said Thomasina. But the first feeling of antagonism to her aunt's proposal was followed by the thought that, although London was a wide world, the chances were more in favour of her meeting Edward Noel there than in Dorsetshire. She twisted the note in her fingers and said slowly, 'After all it is very kind of Aunt Thomasina to ask me, and I remember how happy I was when father and I went up

town together years ago. And father and Polly could come into the house to keep you company while I am away.'

'Oh, as for that, Giles and Mrs. Gibbs will do well enough for me.'

'They may keep up the routine of life, but they cannot make you comfortable, as Polly will do. You and Polly are not nearly so much afraid of each other as you used to be.'

'I like her well enough,' said Sir Richard, not with enthusiasm, 'but I do not like the taste of my tea when you are not here to pour it out.'

'At any rate Polly will make better tea than Giles. And I shall not go away unless it is settled so.'

'I am sure that I do not want you to go, Thomasina. I shall be dull enough until you come home again.'

'But I want to go very much, grandfather. It is time that I should see something of the

great world, and you know that I have only once been in London.'

'And then you got into mischief. Did you not tell me one day that it was in London that you concocted the plot about Anthony's marriage?'

'Yes, grandfather, it was, and you know in your heart that it was the best bit of work that I ever did in my life. Will you write to Aunt Thomasina, or shall I? I will settle with Mary about their staying here.'

On this point also there was some passive resistance to overcome. Mary was pleased to see Thomasina's keen interest in her visit to London and willing to smooth away obstacles, but she felt all the responsibility of taking charge of Sir Richard in the absence of his granddaughter, and could not look forward with any satisfaction to the prospect of hearing Anthony set down as a blockhead or an idiot many times a day, when Thomasina

was not by to soothe Sir Richard's irritation or brave his anger by espousing her father's cause with fearless affection. The sacrifice was made, however, and on the evening before Thomasina left home Anthony and his family migrated to the great house.

'Good-bye, my dear love,' said Sir Richard, patting Thomasina's cheek as they stood together on the hall steps; 'the time will seem long to me until you come home again. You must take care of yourself and not keep late hours, and I hope that you will come back to me with cheeks more round and rosy.' The caressing tenderness of his manner was burnt in on her memory by subsequent events.

## CHAPTER VIII.

SINCE Mrs. Grey had little sympathy with any sentimental weakness, there was a certain absurdity in the fact that the Bertram family had called upon her for the second time to find the clue to a ravelled skein ; but she could only be gratified by such a tribute to her sagacity, and felt herself quite equal to the situation. She received Thomasina with great kindness and an evident anxiety to make her visit to London agreeable, and Thomasina herself was inspirited by the stir and bustle of the gay scene and quite ready to echo Dr. Johnson's sentiment about the full tide of human life. She was ready to enjoy everything, from the whirl of carriages through Stanhope Gate to the cawing of the rooks

which in those days tenanted the tall trees in the gardens of Chesterfield House; and, although trees are not uncommon in Dorsetshire, the fresh and tender green of the young leaves struck a higher note of admiration, from the relief it afforded to the general dinginess of tone pervading the streets of London. Parliament had not yet met, so that Thomasina felt no undue excitement as she drove round the park with Mrs. Grey; she knew how unlikely it was that she should see the only face she greatly cared to recognise.

‘Whom do you want to see, and what are to be your sights?’ said Mrs. Grey; ‘we must put all the pleasure we can into the fortnight.’

‘I do not know anyone but the Camdens,’ said Thomasina; ‘I believe that they are in town.’

‘So you *do* want to see the Camdens?’



‘ Sooner or later ; next week will be time enough,’ replied Thomasina. She was aware the Camdens were the last people from whom Edward Noel was likely to hear of her visit to London, and the chances of meeting him accidentally at their house would be greater after the opening of Parliament.

‘ And how is Sir Harry, Thomasina ?’

‘ He was in excellent health and spirits when I last saw him, which was about three months ago. You know that we gave up hunting very early in the winter.’

‘ So I was glad to hear. I always disapproved of it for you. And what do you do with yourself now in the mornings ?’

‘ I have been reading a good deal. You may remember predicting that I should live to regret my neglected education ?’

‘ Desultory reading is of little use,’ said Mrs. Grey; ‘ a girl wants some one to keep her steadily at work.’

‘Yes,’ said Thomasina thoughtfully. Certainly reading had lost its charm since Noel ceased to select her books. ‘I believe that I must remain a dunce to the end of the chapter, and it does not much signify.’

‘You should not be morbid,’ said Mrs. Grey severely; ‘take it all together there never was a girl who has had more of her own way than you have had.’

‘Than I have *had*,’ repeated Thomasina; ‘but some day I shall be pulled up short, and then I shall not like it at all.’

Mrs. Grey did not know how to interpret this enigmatical saying, but she was aware that she could only reach the truth by a circuitous route. Thomasina, like many girls who have been brought up alone, was frank only in manner, and would resent any direct attempts to penetrate her reserve.

‘There is one sight I should enjoy more than any other,’ resumed Thomasina; ‘I

## THOMASINA.

want to see the Queen open Parliament,' Mrs. Grey thought the wish a reasonable one, and engaged to try and procure a peeress's order; she only demurred to the stipulation that she should accompany her niece.

'Why, my dear,' said she, 'it would be much better for you to go with Lady Camden or some other fine lady than with a scrubby old woman like me.'

'If Lady Camden is a fine lady, I do not admire the species. And you are *not* a scrubby old woman; you will look magnificent in a plume of three feathers, fastened by your diamond aigrette.'

Mrs. Grey smiled grimly, not insensible to the charm of Thomasina's manner, which was at some pains to procure the orders of admission, a more difficult task than usual at that time of year, and when the official enve-

lope at last arrived Thomasina pounced upon it with the eagerness of a child. 'Here are two tickets after all! I am so glad that you can go with me, Aunt Thomasina. I should not have enjoyed it half so much without you.' Mrs. Grey was flattered by the assertion, and allowed Thomasina to take as lively an interest in the pose of her high plume and lace lappets as in her own court dress of white satin, in which she was to appear on this occasion.

When the session of Parliament opens in winter the pageant is shorn of half its glory by the murky atmosphere of a February day in London. The light is too apt to struggle through the foggy panes on ladies who crowd the benches with bare and shivering shoulders and faces expressive of endurance rather than enjoyment. But on this bright May day sunshine and warmth diffused their genial influence through the assembly, and of

those who gathered there none attracted more attention than Thomasina Bertram. Full dress became her regal cast of features, and her rich colouring and eager, animated expression were not less admired for the contrast they presented to the somewhat *fade* and insipid style of an ordinary London beauty.

There was the usual long interval between the time appointed for ladies to take their places and that of the Queen's entrance, and although Thomasina was fully amused in looking about her, while her aunt pointed out some of the old Peninsular generals who took their seats in the body of the House, her spirits were in a flutter of excitement. She waited eagerly, not for the coming of the Queen, although she was young enough to take a certain loyal interest in her appearance, but for the moment, described to her by Edward Noel, when the members of the Lower House were summoned to her

presence, and they came pouring in like a pack of disorderly school-boys. That moment came at last : the faithful Commons streamed through the folding-doors, and in the foremost rank—his hand was resting on the barrier when she saw him—Thomasina recognised Noel. She leaned forward, and, as if by some instinctive sympathy, their eyes met ; a smile, which she thought was the sweetest ever seen on a human face, was flashed back to her, and there the recognition ended. The Queen was speaking, and Thomasina felt the necessity of looking towards her, of listening to the words spoken with her clear, beautiful intonation. When the short speech was ended, and she again looked back, she found it impossible to distinguish Edward Noel in the surging mass of faces. Mrs. Grey had seen her niece's countenance transformed by joyful excitement, and had even observed

the flush which overspread her face and neck, and she was determined to follow up the clue to Thomasina's secret, but she set to work warily, and asked no questions until they were driving home.

'Have you any acquaintance in the House of Commons, Thomasina? I fancy that you bowed to one of that disorderly rabble.'

'I did not bow, but I believe that I recognised Mr. Edward Noel—a cousin of Sir Harry's, whom I met at Ashleigh,' said Thomasina.

'Edward Noel! was not that the man who behaved so shabbily to our old friend Mr. Wilmot?'

'I do not know what you may consider shabby behaviour. Mr. Wilmot lost his seat because he was a Tory, and the Tories of the borough are in the minority. If Mr. Noel had declined to stand, the Liberals

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would have brought forward some other candidate.'

'Oh! that is Mr. Noel's version of the transaction. I really know nothing more than what appeared in the "County Chronicle;" they hinted at some underhand dealing.'

'Newspaper editors are very apt to hint lies which they would not dare to speak openly. I have told you the true facts, not Mr. Noel's version of them—though that also would be the true one—for I have not seen him since he was elected.'

'I do not suppose that you are likely to see him. His politics cannot suit Sir Richard, and now I remember that Lady Camden calls him the black sheep of the family.'

'You are not like Lady Camden, Aunt Thomasina. You will never blast a man's character merely because he has the mis-



fortune to differ from you in politics,' said Thomasina, in a voice which trembled with emotion. She leaned back in the carriage to conceal the tears which rose and fell, and yet she knew that her secret was a secret no longer.

'I hope that I shall always be just,' said Mrs. Grey, in a voice which betrayed an inclination to be not only just but kind. 'I should like to know more of this Mr. Noel.'

'It is your fault that I know him at all,' said Thomasina, smiling through her tears. 'You remember how you insisted on my going to Ashleigh Court? He was there.'

'That was not my doing; I sent you to Ashleigh Court to marry Sir Harry Camden.'

'But I had given you my word that I would not marry him, and you know that the Bertrams are always obstinate.'

‘They are,’ said Mrs. Grey. ‘I should advise you not to fly in the face of Sir Richard’s prejudices.’

‘You talk as if everything was settled between us, Aunt Thomasina. Really there is nothing, nothing *now* between Mr. Noel and me. You need not tell me that there are difficulties; I am disheartened enough already.’

‘You must tell me a little more before I can help you,’ said Mrs. Grey, and she pulled the check-string and directed the coachman to drive twice round the park. She wisely reflected that confidences would be more readily exchanged as they sat side by side in the brougham than if they were to begin afresh in the drawing-room.

‘He came down to Marston Abbas last winter,’ said Thomasina, ‘and he brought his horses for hunting; but, as I told you, we did not go out often, and he did not care

much for it. He used to come and read with me nearly every morning, and Sir Richard knew that he came and thought it a nice thing for me.'

'If Sir Richard had taken my advice and put Mrs. Bertram at the head of his house, she would have had more sense,' observed Mrs. Grey. 'I shall not live to see the day, Thomasina, but when my great great-nieces come to years of discretion, or of indiscretion, you will see the force of choosing an older tutor for them.'

'I never thought how it was to end,' said Thomasina, blushing, 'but at last he asked me to marry him, and I said No.'

'Then there is an end of it,' said Mrs. Grey mercilessly. Thomasina said nothing, and slowly inserted her fingers into the glove she had torn off a minute before.

'It is against all the Bertram traditions to discover that you did not know your own

mind, is it not, Thomasina ?' resumed Mrs. Grey.

'I care nothing for Bertram traditions,' said she, driving back her tears by a strong effort. 'I am very unhappy, and, since you will not help me, you can at least leave me in peace.'

'I must repeat, however, that it was a pity you did not know your own mind. I doubt whether Sir Richard would have welcomed the connection in any case, but his objections might have been less insuperable before this election business. So much I will say, that if politics are the only bar, they ought not to discourage Mr. Noel from pleading his own cause. I cannot say more until I know more about him.'

'You will hear nothing but good of him, unless you go to Lady Camden for information.'

'Surely, my dear, I cannot go to a person

better qualified to tell me all about him than his own aunt.'

'I should not count you for an aunt if you were to tell anyone that father was the black sheep of the family.'

'Because it would be untrue, Thomasina.'

'It is equally untrue of Mr. Noel. Those who are not swayed by the pitiful meanness of spirit which estimates a man's worth by the number of his acres will declare him to be what in truth he is—honourable, single-hearted, and able. I do not know that he is rich, but, as Burns says,

The rank is but the guinea's stamp,  
The man's the gowd for a' that.'

'I do not undervalue moral worth,' said Mrs. Grey, 'but bread and cheese is also an ingredient of married life, though such considerations do not influence your lofty mind. If you wish to convert anyone to your

socialist sentiments, you had better try your hand on Lady Camden.'

'Lady Camden is not worth converting. The ill opinion of some people is only an additional merit in my eyes,' said Thomasina.

'Well, well, we will discuss the matter some other time, when you come to it with a calmer spirit.'

'I did not mean to be impatient ; I feel as if I could bear anything now that you have promised to help me.'

'I made no such promise,' said Mrs. Grey ; nevertheless Thomasina felt that sympathy was implied even in the tone of her denial.

Edward Noel was a man of action and did not wait for anyone to help him. He had steadily refused to quarrel with Lady Camden, and presumed on his relationship to call upon her after dinner that same evening, at an hour when he might rely on

finding her at home. He spoke of having taken his seat without betraying any consciousness that his having done so was a grievous dereliction from the path of duty, and then he went on to say, 'I believe that I saw Miss Bertram in the peeresses' seats to-day, sitting beside an old lady with a certain resemblance to Sir Richard.'

'Sir Richard's sister, Mrs. Grey,' said Lady Camden, after considering for a moment the possibility of withholding her name, and then deciding that it was *not* possible; 'she is an old friend of mine, a thorough Bertram, and a Tory of the old school.'

'Is she indeed?' said Noel; 'still I believe that the crime of Liberalism is less unpardonable in London than in the country, and your report need not deter me from leaving a card on Miss Bertram. Where did you say that Mrs. Grey lived?'

Very unwillingly Lady Camden gave her address in Chesterfield Street, which Edward took the trouble to verify in the 'Court Guide;' and, when he had taken leave, she remarked with irritation that his successful election had made him more domineering and self-sufficient than ever.



## CHAPTER IX.

WHEN the brougham came round next day, at two o'clock, Thomasina had not finished writing the account which she wished to send Sir Richard of the opening of Parliament; she entered into a full description of the old generals in their robes of state and of the splendour of the royal pageant, although the name of the one person whose appearance had swallowed up her interest in all the rest found no place in her letter. As she was not ready, Mrs. Grey said that she would go and pay some visits in the neighbourhood and call again for Thomasina, and thus it came to pass that the fates were propitious to Edward Noel, and that when he called, half-an-hour afterwards, he learned

that Mrs. Grey was out, but that Miss Bertram was still at home. He decided, after only a moment's hesitation, to avail himself of the opportunity, and he was shown upstairs.

Thomasina was the least agitated of the two, or, at all events, the most successful in concealing her agitation. When his name was announced she looked up from the writing-table and saw him standing before her. 'My aunt is out,' she said.

'So I was told. If I did wrong in coming in, I will go away again. At least I shall have seen you.'

'Did you not see me yesterday, Mr. Noel?'

'I did, and I saw you smile. That has given me courage to come to-day.' Noel was not one of those lovers who lose time in inaction, and, since Thomasina had not forbidden him to stay, he sat down beside

her, just as they had been used to sit in the library at Bertram's Chase.

'I suppose that I may congratulate you on your success in the election?' said Thomasina, with a womanly desire to postpone the renewed declaration of love which was so evidently impending.

'Did you take any interest in it? I am afraid that my success has deeply offended the county magnates, and I really cared little about it at the time, though I carried on the contest with a dogged determination not to be beaten. I wonder whether you have thought of the bitter disappointment I have had to live down since I saw you last.'

'I have thought of it,' said Thomasina in a very low voice.

'When I saw you, above all when I saw you smile,' continued Noel, 'it was as if sunshine were suddenly poured into a prison-

house. You will not now bid me go back to cheerless gloom without a ray of hope ?'

It was not hope but certainty which Thomasina was prepared to give him. A few more passionate words and all the truth was told ; she loved him ; she too had pined, and chafed, and bewailed with bitter tears the hasty sentence which had for a while estranged them. An hour seemed all too short to give to the happiness of the present, and they had not bestowed a thought on the difficulties which still overcast the future when Mrs. Grey sent up to say that the carriage was waiting for Miss Bertram. The two lovers looked at each other, as if the fact that there were other people in the world besides themselves was forced upon them with the shock of an unpleasant discovery. ' Will you tell Mrs. Grey that I am not ready ? Perhaps she will come up for a few minutes,' said Thomasina desperately.

Mrs. Grey thought the message an unceremonious one, but when the old soldier servant added, with significance, that a gentleman had called just after she went out, and was still in the drawing-room, she was very willing to get out of the carriage.

‘It is Mr. Noel,’ said Thomasina, as if his presence in her aunt’s house was a perfectly natural and legitimate occurrence.

‘I guessed as much,’ said Mrs. Grey, with an ominous shake of the head. ‘What a self-willed child you are!’

‘No,’ said Noel, ‘the obstinacy is mine. When last I saw Miss Bertram she forbade me to come again, and she had not unsaid that word.’

‘I presume that she has unsaid it now?’ said Mrs. Grey.

‘I think so,’ rejoined Noel, taking Thomasina’s hand in his with a proud and happy smile.

Such audacity took Mrs. Grey's breath away. She had been prepared to further Noel's suit if, on mature consideration, she thought it desirable; but now the two young people had taken the matter out of her hands, and were beaming with happiness, without bestowing a thought on the real difficulties of the situation. She felt that it was her duty to recall them from this fool's paradise. 'Has it occurred to you, Mr. Noel, that Sir Richard Bertram will never sanction his grandchild's engagement?'

'I do not intend to lose a day in demanding Mr. Bertram's consent,' replied Noel.

'Much good that will do you. Anthony will go straight to Sir Richard, for it is with him that the decision rests, as Thomasina will tell you.'

'Then I will go to Sir Richard,' said Noel undauntedly.

'Do so, and in the meanwhile let me

advise you not to fetter Thomasina by an engagement which she will be forced to resign. Thomasina, my dear, I shall be glad to talk the matter over with Mr. Noel if you will go upstairs.'

Thomasina prepared to obey, but her high spirit would not allow her to go without testifying in the most open manner to the strength of her attachment; she went up to her lover and renewed the kiss of betrothal in her aunt's presence. 'You have said it, Edward, that nothing shall come between us; I would not go if I did not trust you entirely.'

'You see how headstrong she is,' said Mrs. Grey, not taking precisely Noel's view of this little episode. 'Well, Sir Richard is just the same, only with sixty additional years of obstinacy to stiffen his character. He is foolishly fond of this child, thinking that nothing is too good for her; and do you

imagine that he will give her away to a man who has still his way to make in the world, and whose politics are an offence in his eyes?'

'You place the difficulties in a strong light, Mrs. Grey, but I shall not think the case desperate until I have seen Sir Richard himself. He was very kind to me last winter, and I cannot suppose that the foolish things which were thought and said of my conduct at the late election can cause any permanent estrangement.'

'You do not know Sir Richard as I do, Mr. Noel. He would not welcome Thomasina's marriage in any case, and I am confident that his objections to such a marriage as this will outweigh all arguments.'

'In that case,' said Noel cheerfully, 'we must trust to time, which modifies the strongest opposition, and we have youth and constancy on our side. I find it easier to say



to you than to Sir Richard, that if his opposition takes the form of withholding the fortune which rumour has assigned to Miss Bertram, it will be a great relief and satisfaction to me. Surely her father has the first claim on whatever he has to leave.'

'Unquestionably he has, Mr. Noel. Anthony is an injured man, although he will always be the last to resent his wrongs.'

'I am certain that his daughter must be at least as unwilling as myself to interfere with his succession. Although I am not a rich man, I have wherewithal to maintain her in the position to which she is entitled, and I confess that if anything could have restrained me from declaring my attachment, it would have been the fear of being considered a political adventurer, who wished to make his fortune by marriage.'

'That is well said, Mr. Noel. It alters *my* view of the matter in any case. I shall

welcome Thomasina's marriage if it is likely to lead to Anthony's restoration to his rightful position as heir to Bertram's Chase, and I would do all in my power to uphold your cause. And, if it comes to a conflict of wills, I think that I can be as obstinate as Sir Richard.'

'So I should imagine,' said Noel smiling. 'May we not dignify firmness in a good cause by the higher name of constancy?'

'As you please. I prefer to call things by their right names; and, if you disapprove of obstinacy, you had better think no more of Thomasina. She has all Sir Richard's temper.'

'Then I need not despair of success with Sir Richard, for she too has once rejected me.'

'So she told me. And why, in the name of wonder? she seems hot enough about it now.'

‘I am far too happy in the present to question the past,’ said Noel loyally; ‘she is mine now, and that is all I care to know. And now, Mrs. Grey, do you not think that you have kept her in suspense long enough? Will you not tell her that you at least have given your consent to our engagement, pending that of Sir Richard?’

Mrs. Grey protested that she had given no such consent, but, as she coupled the protest with the suggestion that Mr. Noel might return to dinner if he would now take his departure, he was not disheartened by her words. She certainly liked this impetuous young man, who went straight to his point with an ardour which bore down all obstacles, and she had a dim belief that it was in such wise that her departed general had wooed and won her five-and-fifty years before. When Noel asked her advice about writing to Sir Richard by that afternoon’s post, she

dissuaded him from doing so until she had again talked over the matter with him ; but she had in fact determined to break ground herself, and, as soon as Noel was gone, she sat down to enclose Thomasina's unfinished letter to her grandfather, and added a few lines of her own. When this was done she went upstairs to Thomasina, who was chafing like a caged lion up and down her little back bedroom.

The first question was, 'Is he gone?'

'For the present, Thomasina ; he is coming back to dinner.'

'How good of you !' exclaimed Thomasina, embracing her aunt in an ecstasy of gratitude ; 'I believe that you will soon like him as well as I do.'

'Then you believe that I am an old fool. And you are not far wrong either, for it is a foolish business and I ought not to have meddled with it. Still, if you are bent on

giving up Sir Richard and your fine prospects at Bertram's Chase, it will be all the better for Anthony and his boys.' Mrs. Grey went on to explain Edward Noel's views on the subject, and Thomasina's heart beat proudly at this proof that his love was disinterested. To give up the rights of heiress-ship seemed a light thing, for she too had at times resented her father's wrongs, and, since she did not know what it was to have a whim ungratified, she could afford to think lightly of the evils of comparative poverty. But to resign the first place in Sir Richard's heart was another matter, and she cherished the unspoken conviction that his love for her was too deeply rooted to yield to the displeasure of the moment. At all events there were no difficulties in the future which could disturb her present happiness. She came down to dinner looking brilliantly handsome, wearing the white satin dress in

which she had gone to the House of Lords on the previous day, and when Mrs. Grey lifted her eyebrows and asked if she had dressed for a party, her niece answered, with perfect serenity, that it was only in compliance with Edward's wish that she wore that dress to-night; he had told her how much he admired it.

‘Perhaps, my dear, he intends to bring the special license in his pocket, and you wish to be prepared with a wedding dress. Curzon Chapel is conveniently near, and it used to be celebrated for its clandestine marriages.’

‘You may laugh at me as much as you please, Aunt Thomasina, if you will not say anything to make Edward uncomfortable.’

Then Edward came, at least equally impervious to ridicule. When he handed Mrs. Grey in to dinner he looked back all the while at Thomasina, and at dinner he did not eat and he did not talk, and again he

looked at Thomasina, with sublime indifference to the inferences which might be drawn by the soldier servant. He would not stay in the dining-room to finish his glass of wine, and, when he found that Mrs. Grey was obtuse enough to retain her usual seat by the fireplace in the drawing-room, he looked through the folding-doors and asked if he did not see a writing-table; might he go into the back room to write a letter? When Mrs. Grey assented she was quite unprepared for the audacity of his next move; he drew Thomasina's hand within his arm, and they promptly disappeared into the angle formed by the folding-doors, a position which was not commanded by Mrs. Grey's arm-chair, and which was quite inaccessible to the writing-table. Mrs. Grey once more shook her head and resigned herself, arguing that it was useless for an old woman to attempt to cope with youthful and irrepressible ardour.

‘I do really want to write by-and-by,’ said Noel, after the exchange of those tender nothings which it would be idle to reproduce ; ‘I ought to write to Sir Richard.’

‘It would be better to see him if he will see you, and perhaps better still to see my father. After all it is he who has the right to decide.’

‘Your aunt says that he will not exercise the right.’

‘Not willingly, but he may be brought to it. There will be a great deal of worry,’ added Thomasina with a sigh ; ‘are you sure that I am worth it?’

But one answer could be given to such a question, and it was an answer which it was pleasant to receive at her lover’s lips. How happy they both were, and how foolish !—foolish with the folly which has gilded the opening life of every pair of true lovers since the world began.



## CHAPTER X.

SOME other engagement had obliged Lady Camden to defer her purposed visit to Mrs. Grey; but she had not relinquished the intention to take the earliest opportunity of revealing her nephew's dangerous designs, and she resolved to go to Chesterfield Street in the morning, at an hour when she might be sure of finding her old friend at home. Mrs. Grey was at home, and so also was Thomasina. She and Noel were again established in the back drawing-room, and they hastily closed the doors when the early visitor was announced. They were really seated at the writing-table this time. Mrs. Grey announced that she had 'paved the way' for Thomasina's confession in the few lines which

she had written to Sir Richard on the previous afternoon, and she advised Noel to go down to Bertram's Chase that day, bearing a letter from Thomasina as his credentials.

She sat with her pen in her hand, anxious and preoccupied, and made one or two unsuccessful beginnings. 'I doubt whether Aunt Thomasina's paving-stones are likely to be of a kind to smooth difficulties,' said she; 'she and Sir Richard do not care what they say to each other; they do not quarrel, and it does not make the least impression. I wonder how angry her letter has made him this morning.'

'It has always seemed to me that Sir Richard's anger could not fall on *you*,' said Noel.

'He was angry with me once, when I resented what was said about your election. It was soon over, and I never thought that I could be really afraid to ask him anything;

but, as Aunt Thomasina says, coming events cast their shadows before, and I could not help being troubled by the letter I had from Polly this morning. She writes that Sir Richard has taken so much notice of the little boys, and that he had the shoes put on my old pony for Dick to take his first ride. Sir Richard was standing in the paddock, while the groom walked him about, and praised his seat. Polly expects me to be pleased, and I am mean enough to feel vexed, for we had agreed that old Strawberry was to be turned out for the rest of his days.'

'I know how much you are giving up for me,' said Edward earnestly.

'I give up nothing that I regret, if I may still keep the first place in Sir Richard's love. I have been obliged to look forward sometimes, when he has told me of all that would be mine after his death, and it was always with the determination to touch nothing which

is of right my father's. When I think of that I am almost glad to believe that his anger will settle the inheritance as it should be settled in his lifetime, but I wish I could get over the first burst. At any rate I must write.' And with desperate resolution she scribbled off two little notes.

'MY DEAREST GRANDFATHER,—You must not be angry with me when I say that I love Edward with all my heart. You will love him too when you know him as I do.

'Your affectionate

'THOMASINA.'

'MY DEAR POLLY,—I am afraid that Sir Richard will not be pleased with what Edward has to tell, but remember that he was angry with you and Anthony, and yet you married and are happy. You must stand by me now and not allow father to see only with Sir Richard's eyes, or to forget that, since I am his child, he has the right and the

power to make us happy. We shall always love each other, even if we are parted, and, when you hear that Aunt Thomasina is on our side, you will not think us altogether unreasonable. I am glad that Sir Richard is kind to Dick. I have always wished that he should love him, but you must let him still love me a little. Yours affectionately,

‘THOMASINA BERTRAM.’

Thomasina was dissatisfied with her own compositions, but Noel declared them to be convincing. He put his arm round her waist and whispered that he must go, and she turned away to hide her tears. She knew that his mission to Bertram's Chase must provoke anger and distress, but it was the necessity of parting with her lover for even a few hours by which she was more affected. She said that London would be a howling wilderness until he returned, and Noel would have been less gratified by a more rational

remark. 'Say good-bye to Mrs. Grey for me,' he said; 'I have barely time to catch the train, and I do not feel courageous enough to encounter a morning visitor.' He congratulated himself on his diffidence when he went downstairs and saw by the Camden liveries who the visitor was. Lady Camden was unsuspecting enough to be equally pleased that Thomasina's absence from the room left her at liberty to speak all her mind to Mrs. Grey.

'I was anxious for a confidential talk with you,' she said, lowering her voice even while she glanced round to ascertain that the folding-doors were securely fastened. 'You are aware of my sincere regard for your dear niece, and you will believe that my interference in her behalf is perfectly disinterested when I add that I hope very shortly to be able to announce Harry's engagement to a girl of good fortune and connections; in some

respects, perhaps, better calculated to make him happy than Thomasina.'

'Indeed!' said Mrs. Grey; 'I did not know that heiresses were so plentiful. Although, indeed, I have ceased to consider Thomasina an heiress since my last visit to the Chase. Anthony has three fine boys, and he may have half-a-dozen more.'

'I am thankful to say,' rejoined Lady Camden, 'that Harry's own position, as well as his noble and disinterested nature, entitle him to overlook such considerations; but, if the facts were more generally known, our dear Thomasina would not run the risk of becoming the prey of designing adventurers.'

'It appears to me that Anthony's marriage is a fully recognised fact,' said Mrs. Grey; 'he and his wife and children are keeping house for Sir Richard in Thomasina's absence.'

‘ Ah, indeed !’ said Lady Camden. Mrs. Grey, although so shrewd on ordinary occasions, was provokingly obtuse to the hint she intended to convey. ‘ I hope that Thomasina is in her usual health and spirits ?’

‘ I never saw her look so well. I assure you that she made quite a sensation in the peeresses’ seats the other day.’

Here at last was an opening, of which Lady Camden eagerly availed herself. ‘ So I heard—so at least I understood from Edward Noel. He recognised her and came to me the same evening to know where she was to be found. I confess that I have felt uneasy ever since, as I could not see my way to withholding your name.’

‘ Why should you withhold it ?’ said Mrs. Grey ; ‘ a connection of yours must always be welcome.’

‘ My dear Mrs. Grey,’ said Lady Camden, ‘ it is not as my nephew, but as an admirer of



your niece, that Edward Noel will attempt to force his acquaintance upon you.'

'He has not only attempted but succeeded, Lady Camden. Mr. Noel called upon me yesterday, and, as the young people seemed pleased to meet, I invited him to dinner.' And Mrs. Grey's keen grey eyes glittered with satisfaction at her old friend's discomfiture.

'In that case, Mrs. Grey, it is probable that my warning comes too late. But I think that you ought to know how much ill-natured gossip has been talked about his constant visits to the Chase last winter. Poor Sir Richard is not as young as he was, and there was no one to give Thomasina a word of advice. But for my peculiar relations, as Edward's aunt and dear Harry's mother, I might have risked giving offence by speaking to her myself. They were always together, and no good can come of it; for if Edward

had really cared for her, he could not have flown in the face of Sir Richard's well-known opinions, as he did at the last election.'

'Such adherence to his own opinions was certainly impolitic,' said Mrs. Grey; 'I doubt if it will justify you in calling him a mere adventurer.'

'I was speaking generally,' said Lady Camden. 'I have no wish to prejudice you against my nephew, who is really a talented young man, and he only needs a good fortune to further his political career.'

'In that case, Lady Camden, we had better not consider him an admirer of Thomasina, since we have agreed that her fortune must be a moderate one. Suppose you ask Sir Harry to look out for another heiress for him.'

Such an ungenerous reflection on Thomasina's preference for Sir Harry's rival was too much for Lady Camden's equanimity, and

she took a hasty leave, Mrs. Grey remaining the mistress of the situation.

‘ Was it Lady Camden ? ’ said Thomasina, entering cautiously after she had watched the departing visitor downstairs ; ‘ I thought I recognised her metallic tones.’

‘ Yes, it was your aunt-in-law elect, my dear. Let us hope that she will please you better in that relationship than if she had become your mother-in-law.’

‘ Of course she came to pry into Edward’s concerns. Did she apologise for the lies she has told of him ? ’

‘ She said, what we have all heard once or twice before, that her nephew is a political adventurer.’

‘ She is a wicked, designing woman,’ said Thomasina with flashing eyes. The Bertrams were certainly, as a family, given to strong language.

‘ So Mr. Noel is gone ? ’ resumed Mrs. Grey ;

‘I fancied that Lady Camden’s visit might have had the effect of causing him to lose his train, since I was not there to give him the parting shove. Were you really able to let him go?’

‘We are not so foolish as you think,’ said Thomasina blushing.

‘Then, my dear,’ rejoined Mrs. Grey, ‘my imagination must be lively indeed.’

While Noel was speeding on his way to Bertram’s Chase, consternation and anger had preceded him there. The London letters were not at that time delivered in the outlying districts of England before the middle of the day, and, indeed, this was still considered an extraordinary and somewhat inconvenient instance of rapid communication. Anthony seldom waited for the post to start on his morning’s ride, and Sir Richard was alone when he received Mrs. Grey’s letter. He was at a loss for an object on which to

vent his angry agitation ; he rang the bell to enquire whether Mr. Bertram had ridden out, and swore at him for being always out of the way when he was wanted ; and, since he found himself unable to contain his indignation, he betook himself to the library, although he was on terms of ceremonious politeness with Mrs. Bertram, which made him feel the necessity of exercising a certain restraint over his expressions.

‘ Have you heard from Thomasina ? ’ he asked in a husky voice, which caused Mary to look up in surprise and alarm.

‘ No, Sir Richard. I hope there is no bad news ? ’

‘ Ten to one it is only a mare’s nest of her aunt’s,’ said Sir Richard, as he crumpled up Mrs. Grey’s letter in his hand—‘ something about that fellow Noel, who was prowling about here last winter. It seems that he has found her out in London, and came to Chesterfield Street.’

‘ I was afraid—I fancied that they cared for each other,’ said Mary, changing colour.

‘ Then why, in the name of Heaven, did you not say so ? But that is always the way with women. When the mischief is done they turn round and say that they saw it all the time.’

‘ I believe that the mischief was done before I knew it,’ said Mary, not resenting the accusation ; ‘ I was surprised when I came up here, some time after you made Mr. Noel’s acquaintance, to see him so much at home with her.’

‘ If I had dreamed that he was after Thomasina in that sort of way, I should have sent him about his business fast enough, although at that time I did not think so ill of the fellow. Now that he has shown himself in his true colours, it is monstrous to suppose that we should meet, even on friendly terms,

and yet he has the assurance to make love to Thomasina ; of course he only wants to make use of her money to further his seditious schemes for the ruin of the country.'

'It need not be his only motive,' Mary ventured to say ; 'no one can have known Thomasina as intimately as he has done without loving her.'

'I do not believe a word of it,' said Sir Richard ; 'she is a hundred times too good for him, and he has taken advantage of her innocence to blind her eyes to his fortune-hunting. Lady Camden hinted as much last winter, though I thought at the time that it was only jealousy because his wits are sharper than Sir Harry's. I wish that Anthony would come home, that we might settle what is to be done ; as he is her father, the letter will come better from him, and he must put it pretty strong too, so as to put an end to this confounded business at once. If her

aunt had not thrown herself into it, like an old fool as she is, it might be better to keep Thomasina in London; but, as it is, I shall order her to come home at once.'

So Sir Richard talked on, Mary fruitlessly putting in a word now and then, to allay his indignation, until Anthony returned. Anthony, rather to his wife's surprise, took an equally stern view of the enormity of Edward Noel's offence. Presumption and treachery were the mildest terms applied to it; he had no fortune, no position in the county, and if he possessed any landed property, the amount was insignificant. His Liberal opinions must have prevented his rising to any eminence, even in politics, unless the country had sunk to such a depth of degradation as to make distinction itself dishonourable, and, under such circumstances, it was a wanton insult to aspire to win Thomasina's hand. In these sentiments the father and son were fully agreed; they only



differed as to the proper person to express them. Anthony was certain that they would come with greater weight from Sir Richard, while Sir Richard was equally confident that Anthony's authority as a father might be used with the greatest effect. In fact, they were both unwilling to disturb the normal relations between Thomasina and her elders, and it required some moral courage to reverse the sequence of events by which she had ever been the one to command and the others to obey. When at last it was decided that the letter should be signed and written by Anthony he had not much share in its composition; Sir Richard's indignant grief was energetically expressed, and he earnestly desired Thomasina to return home at once and to think no more of her unworthy lover. Sir Richard wrote himself to Mrs. Grey, declaring his irrevocable determination to withhold his consent to such a 'monstrous proposal,' and

reminding her that the portion settled on Thomasina was too slender to afford a bait to a needy fortune-hunter.

‘ Exactly the line which I wished him to take,’ remarked Mrs. Grey complacently, but Thomasina was less gratified by her share of the contents of the envelope.

‘ Polly might have written to tell me whether father is really as angry as he seems to be,’ she said. ‘ You see what he says about going home. Do you think that I ought to go to-day ?’

‘ Not to-day, my dear, certainly. Since Mr. Noel was to see Sir Richard last night, we had better wait to hear the result of the interview.’

Thomasina accepted the reprieve, and felt that in truth she could not have returned to the Chase until she had again seen her lover ; but she was restless and unhappy, and wished many times in the course of that long day of

suspense that she had decided to plead their cause herself. Letters were hard and cruel things, and it would not be easy for Sir Richard to unsay the harsh words which he had written ; yet she still cherished a belief in the power of her own presence.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE letter to Chesterfield Street had been written and posted, when Giles, with a momentous expression on his usually immovable countenance, brought in Mr. Edward Noel's card.

'Say that I cannot see him,' replied Sir Richard, tearing the card in half and replacing it on the salver. Anthony doubted the expediency of such an extreme measure, but he ventured on no protest. Giles went out of the room with the message, and presently returned again.

'Mr. Noel's compliments, and would Mr. Bertram be so good as to see him?'

'Confound the fellow's impudence!' said Sir Richard; 'cannot he understand the

meaning of a plain answer? Tell Mr. Noel that we are both engaged, and that we shall be engaged whenever he calls.'

'Wait outside the door for a moment, Giles,' added Anthony, and, while the old servant complied with the order, carefully closing the door after him, Sir Richard turned upon his son with sudden fury.

'Do you wish to put me on one side, sir, that you presume to interfere with the orders I give to my servants?'

No one could be more surprised than was Anthony himself by the courage with which he occasionally braved his father's fits of unreasonable anger, and he now replied with great firmness, 'I hope, Sir Richard, that I am not wanting in honour and respect to you, when I venture to suggest that such is not the message which one gentleman ought to send to another. We have no right to assume the errand on which he comes.'

‘I told Thomasina that he should never cross the threshold again after his behaviour about the election, and I hold to my word,’ said Sir Richard sullenly; ‘Giles may tell him that, as civilly as he likes.’

Anthony construed this reply into permission to retract the former message, and accordingly Giles was recalled and instructed to say that Mr. Bertram also was particularly engaged. ‘So now he has got his answer,’ said Sir Richard, ‘and may go back to London as he came; if Thomasina takes the morning train to-morrow, as I desired her, he will pass her on the road.’ Noel, however, was far from thinking that he *had* got his answer, and when Anthony left his father’s room some time afterwards he was waylaid by Giles.

‘If you please, sir,’ said the old servant mysteriously, ‘Mr. Noel insisted that I should tell you that he cannot go back to London.

until he has seen you. He has gone down to the cottage, and he said that he should wait for you there till half-past six o'clock.'

'Very well, Giles,' said Anthony, with apparent composure, though he was in reality much exercised in mind. He would not provoke Sir Richard's certain prohibition by consulting him in the matter; he wanted resolution to act for himself, and he adopted the middle course of taking counsel with his wife.

'I hardly see how you can refuse to see him,' said Mary; 'it will, in fact, be easier to make him understand the strength of Sir Richard's opposition if you meet and talk it over.'

'He must clearly understand that already, Mary. He only wants to talk me over.'

'*Don't* be talked over unless his reasons are convincing,' said Mary smiling; 'it would not take much to convince me that political prejudice is an insufficient reason for interfer-

ing with the happiness of two people who are satisfied that they were born for each other.'

' You have heard what Sir Richard says ; he will never consent to such a marriage,' said Anthony.

' Then the sooner Mr. Noel understands his position the better it will be for both. Certainly he has a right to demand a personal interview,' said Mary, and her husband took his hat and walked down to the cottage. It would have saved time to ride, but the sound of his horse's feet might have induced Sir Richard to make inconvenient enquiries.

Edward Noel had obtained admission to the cottage, and was sitting in the dismantled drawing-room, not in the most cheerful mood. He found some satisfaction in looking at a miniature of Thomasina, taken when she was a child of four years old ; she wore a short-waisted white frock, falling off her shoulders,



and a blue sash; her short brown curls fell over her eyes, bright and brown then, as they still were, and in the brilliancy of colouring and softness of expression the child could not surpass the woman. He heard the sound of Anthony's entrance into the hall, and the two men were almost equally embarrassed when, a moment afterwards, they met face to face. Anthony, to cover his confusion, began to talk of the miniature.

'You were looking at Thomasina's likeness, Mr. Noel. It was very like her at the time it was taken, and now we think it very like Tom.'

'Do you indeed?' said Noel, with profound pity for the indiscriminating admiration of a parent. To please Thomasina he had been hypocritical enough to try to admire Tom, but he now only remembered that he was a small boy of a brickdust complexion, who wore a dirty pinafore. 'It is of Thoma-

sina that I wished to speak; she has given me leave to call her so.'

It was Anthony's turn to say 'Indeed!' this time. Sir Richard's comment would probably have been more eloquent, and Anthony began to regret that he had followed the advice of his wife rather than the instinct of his father. He felt as unequal as Mrs. Grey had felt before him to divert the course in which the two young people had decided that their lives should run, and his tone was as hesitating and apologetic as that of Noel was assured.

'You can scarcely be aware, Mr. Noel, that Sir Richard has declared that he will never sanction your engagement to my daughter?'

'His refusal to see me just now has prepared me for opposition,' said Noel gravely; 'the strong love I bear to Thomasina, and her own assurance that it is not unrequited,

lead me to believe that his opposition may be overcome. At any rate, Mr. Bertram, I have a right to ask that my suit shall not be rejected unheard. I am not the penniless adventurer which my relations have chosen to represent me to be, and I neither expect nor desire to receive any accession to my fortune at the hands of my wife.' He entered into fuller details about his private means, and when Anthony found that Noel's income somewhat exceeded that which Sir Richard considered an ample allowance for his only son, he felt the difficulty of objecting to its insufficiency. But, on the other hand, he remembered that his own means were stinted in order that Thomasina's portion might be increased, and that Sir Richard still regarded her as the true heiress of Bertram's Chase.

'I do not ask for an answer now,' continued Noel with renewed hopefulness, as he watched the effect of his words; 'I ask only that you

should do me the justice of believing that I act from no interested motives. I must entrust to you the note which Thomasina hoped that I should deliver to Sir Richard himself, and there is one also for Mrs. Bertram. I intend to sleep at Marston Abbas to-night, and to-morrow I shall return to town, unless I hear from you there. This only I must say in conclusion, that until I hear from Thomasina's own lips that she has ceased to love me, I shall not cease to believe that she will become my wife.'

If victory consists in having the last word, Anthony accepted his defeat, for he shook hands with Noel, courteously but in silence. He did not wish to be late for dinner, a misdemeanour which would not dispose Sir Richard to receive the confession which he had to make with greater favour, and he walked hurriedly back and dressed in time to appear as dinner was announced, and just as Mary

was summoning courage to declare that he had not returned. Sir Richard never missed Thomasina more than he did at the dinner hour; she used to serve up the little incidents of the day so brightly and pleasantly, and he enjoyed the dishes which she had ordered and recommended to his taste, and liked to hear her praise the home-bred mutton and criticise the flavour of the pineapple. Mary was dutifully attentive to his tastes and solicitous to please him, but the effort was too palpable, and this evening he was anxious and gloomy and unable to respond to her well-chosen topics. When dessert was on the table, and the servants had left the room, Anthony had determined that Mary's presence would be an advantage in the communication which he had to make.

‘I have seen Noel after all, Sir Richard. I found that he was waiting for me at the cottage.’

There was more of vexation than of anger in the tone of the old man's reply. 'I believe that you are all in a plot together to deceive and defy me. It is quite time that I should be put underground.'

Anthony's voice trembled with emotion as he answered, 'My dear father, you wrong me cruelly in thinking so. In this matter, as in all others, I shall try never to fail in my love and duty towards you. But Thomasina is my child, and something also is due to her.'

'Has Thomasina thought of what is due to me?' said Sir Richard; 'since she clung to my knees as a baby she has been more to me than all the world. I thought that you wronged her in your second marriage—Mrs. Bertram will forgive my saying so—and I have saved for her, lived for her, planned for her. And now she flings away her heart to the first idle fellow who asks for it, with-

out so much as caring to know what I think of him.'

'She has written to you, Sir Richard. Noel hoped to give you the letter,' said Anthony, laying it before him.

Sir Richard took up the letter with a trembling hand; he said that his glasses were dim, and he could not see to read it now, although, he added, it seemed to be short enough.

'Noel sleeps at Marston Abbas to-night, in hopes that you will see him,' continued Anthony.

'I will not see him, Anthony, nor hear anything that he has said to you. Let Thomasina come home, and I will see her. We will talk no more to-night; it has been a long day, and I shall be glad to go to bed.' Sir Richard unconsciously echoed the words which had been used by Thomasina when her father's second marriage had been the

subject of dispute, but the vexation of the old cuts more deeply than that of the young. He declined to return with Anthony and his wife to the drawing-room, and they saw no more of him that evening.

‘Thomasina must give it up,’ said Anthony decidedly, when he found himself alone with his wife; ‘Sir Richard will never bear it.’

‘So they said to us five years ago,’ said Mary, not insensible to the appeal contained in her letter from Thomasina.

‘The circumstances are different, Mary. Sir Richard has ever been a good and tender father,’ and Anthony spoke in such good faith that Mary felt no inclination to gainsay the statement; ‘but he has loved Thomasina with a peculiar love, and, after all that he has lavished upon her, surely he may expect her to give up a little for him.’

‘If it is a little,’ said Mary, ‘but the more



he has indulged her, the less Thomasina will be inclined to give way on the first occasion when he has ever thwarted her will. And you know her nature; she will cling more loyally to her love if Sir Richard declares the object to be unworthy. What did you think of Mr. Noel?’

‘I can hardly doubt that he thinks more of herself than of her money, but Sir Richard will never be brought to see it.’

‘If anyone can bring him to see it, it will be Thomasina herself,’ said Mary. ‘I hope that she will obey his summons and come home to-morrow. If not, you must go to town to fetch her.’

‘I wish that I had had no hand in her going to London at all,’ observed Anthony. ‘I never thought that my aunt would have encouraged such folly.’

‘Perhaps her encouragement is a proof that the folly is not so great after all.

Remember how she helped us, Anthony, and then you will not resent her interference.'

'I can remember nothing but my poor father's vexation,' said Anthony with a heavy sigh, and no argument of Mary's could induce him to look at the matter from Thomasina's point of view.

Edward Noel, meanwhile, was spending his evening at the 'George,' still hoping to receive some conciliatory message from Bertram's Chase. The private parlour was got ready for him, since a rather convivial party of farmers were in possession of the coffee-room, and, as it had been disused and unaired for some weeks, the prevailing odours of fustiness and dry rot struck disagreeably on his senses. He looked out of the window, which only commanded a view of the stable-yard; he fingered the chimney ornaments and the cloudy glasses on the sideboard; and finally he rang for the news-

papers. The landlady brought him a stray copy of the 'Times,' some three days old, and a file of 'County Chronicles.' In the excitement of the election he had not found time to read all the abuse which was heaped upon him, and now he went leisurely through it. The paragraph which asserted that one worthy baronet had cherished a viper in his bosom was not lost upon him, and in the very last number of the Chronicle there was the report of a county meeting, at which Sir Richard Bertram took the chair, for the purpose of getting up a testimonial of respect and sympathy for the ejected Wilmot. Noel threw the paper to the other end of the room, and was less surprised that the evening wore away without his receiving any summons to Sir Richard's presence. He, too, was ready to admit that if anyone could prevail with Sir Richard, it must be Thomasina herself.

## CHAPTER XII.

By tacit consent Thomasina's name was unspoken at the breakfast-table at the Chase next morning, and it was only when he went to the stables that Anthony learned that Sir Richard had given orders that the carriage was to go to the station and await the arrival of three London trains. The post-bag contained no letter from Thomasina, and Anthony construed this into a sign of her coming; but his wife argued that she would neither come nor write until she knew how Edward Noel had been received.

One little incident betrayed the workings of Sir Richard's mind, as straws may mark the direction of a current. Whenever they were at the Chase, Mary prudently kept her

children out of sight until Sir Richard asked for them, and this morning he observed that Dick was quite old enough to dine at the luncheon-table. He appeared accordingly, as the gong sounded, with shining hair, an irreproachable pinafore, and an awful sense of the honour done to him. The high cane chair on which Thomasina used to sit in younger days was brought forward and placed on Sir Richard's right hand, a small knife and fork was laid for him, and even this was not enough; Sir Richard observed that he wanted a silver mug, and called for a curiously chased goblet, which had been his own christening mug, nearly eighty years before.

'Miss Bertram's mug? yes, Sir Richard,' said Giles very respectfully, but in a tone which his master knew how to interpret.

'It is *not* Miss Bertram's mug. She chose to use it, because she happened to like it

better than her own. The mug is mine, and is engraved with my cipher, which is the same as yours, Dick, and, if you are a good boy, I shall give it to you.'

Giles fetched the goblet from the sideboard with no alacrity. Thomasina had ruled over the hearts of her dependants for eighteen years, and the old servant could not say 'Le roi est mort ; vive le roi !' with a good grace.

As he placed the dessert on the table that evening Giles informed Sir Richard that the carriage had returned empty.

'I think she will come to-morrow,' said Mary, finding courage to break the angry silence with which the intimation was received.

'Then she will have to come out in a fly,' replied Sir Richard ; 'I am not going to have the servants and horses hanging about the town for another whole day.'

With Thomasina also the day had gone

heavily when she learned from her father's letter that Sir Richard refused even to entertain the possibility of a match so opposed to his strongest prejudices. 'On such a letter I believe that you ought to go home to-day,' said Mrs. Grey.

'I do not know what I *ought* to do,' said Thomasina with inflexible determination, 'but, unless you turn me out of the house, I shall stay here until I have seen Edward again.'

'I do not wish to take any extreme measures,' said Mrs. Grey; 'you shall stay here to-night, and I will write and tell Sir Richard that I intend to bring you down to-morrow. I am not so young as I was, and I do not care to be put out of my way by leaving town at this time of the year; but I do not suppose that I shall die of it, and before now it has happened that I have been able to make Sir Richard see reason when no one else could do so.'

Thomasina thanked her warmly, even while it occurred to her that it was a strange instance of the revolutions wrought by time that she should live to be grateful to her aunt for proposing a visit to the Chase. She continued to listen with weary and unsatisfied ears to the sound of approaching and receding wheels until late in the evening, when she started at the peculiar grating sound of the wheels of a Hansom cab, which was pulled up suddenly against the curb-stone, followed by a sharp ring at the door-bell. 'I was sure that he could not leave me in suspense for another night,' she said.

'You had better moderate your expectations, my dear,' replied Mrs. Grey. 'If I am not much mistaken, the matter will remain in suspense for some time to come.'

Noel came upstairs three steps at a time, quite outstripping the servant who laboured to announce him, and, when he opened the



door, Thomasina sprang forward and almost threw herself into his arms. Almost, but not quite, for she drew back with a sudden fit of bashfulness, and Mrs. Grey received his first greeting. Then he turned to Thomasina and drew her to his side. 'You too look anxious and dispirited,' he whispered, 'but while we are together all is well.'

'And now tell us, Mr. Noel,' said Mrs. Grey; 'Thomasina can scarcely be more impatient than I am to know how your suit prospered.'

'Sir Richard has refused to see me,' said Edward gravely.

'And Mr. Bertram?' added Mrs. Grey; 'unpleasant duties usually devolve on poor Anthony. I suppose that you have seen one of them, or you would have come back sooner?'

'I waited in Marston Abbas until noon, in hopes of seeing or hearing more from

the Chase, but no message came. I did see Mr. Bertram yesterday, but he gave me no hope. In fact, I have done nothing, or worse than nothing.'

'Then there is the more left for us to do,' said Thomasina, assuming a spirit which she was far from feeling. 'Aunt Thomasina and I are going home to-morrow, and I know that Sir Richard will be sorry and ashamed.'

'You will remember what I said of his obstinacy?' added Mrs. Grey.

'Yes, Aunt Thomasina, and you also told Edward that I was just as obstinate. And so I am when I am in the right, and the right cause must prevail,' said Thomasina with flashing eyes.

'If it *is* right to bring strife and disunion into a family,' said Noel, and Thomasina was so stung by the doubt that she withdrew from the arm which encircled her waist, and said reproachfully,

‘You think that I am not worth it.’

‘My dear Thomasina,’ said Mrs. Grey, unceremoniously cutting short Edward’s protestations, ‘it will be time enough for lovers’ quarrels when you are recognised lovers, and meanwhile let us look at the matter from a practical point of view. If the fates are propitious, you will marry and be happy; if not, Mr. Noel will honourably withdraw his pretensions to your hand. For this evening, there is nothing to be done but to go quietly to bed. Mr. Noel looks fagged to death, and he must not come here again in the morning, for you have all your packing to do, and I do not want to lose the early train.’

‘I will not slight the advice of our only friend and ally,’ said Noel, shaking hands with her. ‘Only one word more—may I write?’

‘To me, Mr. Noel; certainly not to

Thomasina. I will write to you when I have had my talk out with Sir Richard, and in the meantime you must be patient.'

'That is excellent but wholly impracticable advice,' said Noel, but he went, after one eloquent, lingering glance at Thomasina.

'I certainly like the young man,' said Mrs. Grey emphatically. 'There is no nonsense about him.' From which Thomasina argued that her aunt considered that there was a good deal of nonsense about *her*.

Sir Richard kept his word, and although Mrs. Grey had named the train by which they proposed to arrive, they were left to find their own way from the station. One of the porters informed them that the carriage had been in the day before, and, when they had driven off, Mrs. Grey said, 'If we had taken Sir Richard by storm, it would have saved Mr. Noel a useless journey.'

'It is so easy to be wise after the event,'

replied Thomasina irritably, but Mrs. Grey took the remark with great forbearance. She knew that her niece had not slept for some nights, and that she was thoroughly nervous and unstrung, although she had been used to declaim against the consciousness of possessing nerves as a piece of contemptible affectation. Under these circumstances silence was the best medicine, but its soothing qualities were scarcely felt during the twelve miles in a jingling fly, and, in spite of Thomasina's agitation and uneasiness about the nature of her reception, they were both rejoiced when the park gates of the Chase flew open to admit them. The sound of wheels brought Anthony and Mary to the hall door, and nothing could be more affectionate than their greeting, but Sir Richard was neither there nor in the library. Mrs. Grey made the enquiry which Thomasina's parched lips refused to utter. 'Is

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Sir Richard out? I wrote to tell him that he might expect us this afternoon.'

'I think that he is in his room,' said Anthony; 'shall I send Giles to tell him that you have come?'

'Perhaps Thomasina had better go,' said Mrs. Grey, looking at her. The colour came into her face and the tears to her eyes, but, after a moment's hesitation, she turned and went. Never before had she had cause to doubt her welcome, but now her hand trembled on the lock before she could summon courage to enter the room. Sir Richard sat at his writing-place with some pretence of occupation, and Thomasina noticed that he also turned over his papers with a trembling hand. She bent down and kissed his forehead. 'Did you not know that we were come, grandfather?'

'I thought I heard a carriage,' said Sir Richard without looking up.

‘I suppose that you were wondering whether you could refuse to see me as well as Mr. Noel?’ said Thomasina, stung by his coldness.

‘No, Thomasina; I was thinking how it was that nothing should bring you home but the desire to defy my wishes.’

‘Blame me if you will,’ said Thomasina, struggling to be calm; ‘but at least hear what Aunt Thomasina has got to say. She will tell you that I have nothing to be ashamed of, and that Mr. Noel does me too much honour by his love.’

‘Then I will not see her. I will take my dinner here by myself. Surely the house is large enough for you all, without your coming to interfere with me here.’

‘To interfere with you!’ repeated Thomasina, bursting into tears. ‘Oh, grandfather! when I was a toddling child I used to come in here at all times and seasons, to play with

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your seals and to mix up your papers, and you were displeased with anyone who said that I was in mischief. And now that I come to see you, after I have been away, you say that I am intruding.'

'There, there, that will do,' said Sir Richard. 'It is of no use to cry over spilt milk, and we have all changed since those days. I could never have believed that you would set your heart on this worthless fellow. You knew my opinion of him before he asked you, and yet you and your aunt are as cool about it as if it were the best match in the world.'

'And so it is for me, grandfather. But I will not argue about it now; I only ask that we should be friends again, and that you will be kind to Aunt Thomasina, who has come from London on purpose to see you.'

'I never asked her to come,' said Sir Richard, 'but I daresay that she will talk



over Anthony, and make more mischief than there is already, if I leave them together. Tell her to come to me here.'

Thomasina did not approve of this series of private interviews, believing that Sir Richard would be less obdurate if the whole weight of the family conclave could be brought to bear upon him. 'I will not ask her to come to you now, grandfather; she is tired and you are bothered. Come with me to the library, where we shall be all together. I want to see you with Dick, for Mary wrote that you were really good friends.'

'Dick is a fine little fellow,' said Sir Richard, 'and if I take to him now, I shall not live until he is old enough to disappoint me.' Even this hard saying could not shake Thomasina's resolution to be patient. She kissed him in reply, and said that if Dick lived to a hundred, he would never disappoint the expectations of his family.

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‘You should see him on horseback,’ continued Sir Richard; ‘even now his seat is better than Noel’s.’ This gibe was a little too much, and Thomasina turned to leave the room, but the silent protest effected more than her previous forbearance.

‘Here, child, come back. I did not mean to mention the fellow’s name, but I am nearly beside myself with vexation. I will go with you to the library, but I will not be bothered with anything this evening. It will be time enough to-morrow, and you must tell me about all the fine people in London.’

It was on this understanding that he joined the family party, and, except for his ostentatious attention to Dick, no one need have noticed that there was any jarring element. When the children were dismissed mutual constraint was more evident, and dinner could scarcely be called a social meal. Anthony looked anxiously at his father, Tho-

masina looked at her plate, and Mrs. Grey alone seconded Mary's laborious efforts to make conversation. In the evening Mrs. Grey proposed a rubber of whist, and Mary heroically sacrificed her dread of becoming Sir Richard's partner to her desire to release Thomasina, who, as she expected, crept off to bed as soon as the game had begun. Pale and heavy-eyed, she assented to Mrs. Grey's suggestion that she was tired by her journey, and by the gaieties of her week in London, but there was in truth more of mental than of bodily suffering in the tears and moans which she tried to stifle in her pillow. However engrossing the passion for her lover might be, it could not at this moment outweigh the pain and mortification of seeing her place filled up, of meeting estranged looks where she had never known anything but the tenderest and most unquestioning affection. Her unswerving resolution to cling to her


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love in spite of all opposition could not sustain her in the first bitterness of such a discovery, and through the long hours of the night her mind was racked by doubts and fears, until at length kindly sleep closed her eyes and sent her into the land of dreams, where she might wander in fancy through the glades of the Chase with her lover by her side, and with no misgivings to mar the felicity of the moment.

## CHAPTER XIII.

‘I KNOW all that you have got to say,’ said Sir Richard, when he found himself alone with his sister on the following morning, ‘so you had better make it as short as you can.’

‘If you know it already, Sir Richard, it is because your better judgment disapproves of the line you have taken. And there is very little to say. I should be the last person to deny that you have the power, and to a certain extent the right, of refusing to sanction this engagement; I do not say myself that Thomasina might not have made a better choice, but then you did not give her a choice. Since you allowed the two young people to meet four days a week, and to sit together reading sentimental poetry, you ought to



be prepared to take the consequences. If you had placed Mrs. Bertram at the head of the house, as I advised, she would have looked after the child.'

'That is always the way with women,' snarled Sir Richard; 'they fall back on some bit of advice which has been neglected as the cause of all the mischief.'

'The mischief is done at any rate, Sir Richard, and there is no need to quarrel about the cause, but it is not too late to consider the consequences. You may work upon Thomasina to give up her lover. I can see that she is drawn two ways even now. And, when the sacrifice is made, she will only think of him the more, and you will see her throw herself away, in a fit of pique, on some man she does not care for, or go sighing about the house, only waiting until you are in your grave to marry Edward Noel.'

‘That is just what you said in Anthony’s affair,’ observed Sir Richard.

‘I am not to blame if history repeats itself. I told you, or poor Julia, which is the same thing, that if you let Anthony ride about with a girl of that age, something would come of it, and you thought me an officious old woman. However, now that they are man and wife, you know in your heart that you did wisely to consent to the marriage. Anthony is a happy man, and you can fall back upon your grandsons now that Thomasina has displeased you.’

‘If Thomasina returns to her duty, and promises to think no more of Noel, I shall not alter my will,’ said Sir Richard.

‘Take my advice and alter your will without giving her a choice in the matter. Let it be known that you have thrown back all the money you had accumulated into the estate, and that Thomasina will only have

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the small sum settled on the daughters of the first marriage, and then if Mr. Noel is the fortune-hunter you consider him to be, he will readily find an excuse for backing out of his engagement.'

Sir Richard was evidently struck by the good sense of this suggestion.' 'And if he sticks to it after all?'

'Then you will have no excuse for refusing your consent. There is nothing against the young man except his politics, and they will not trouble you much when he is in London. He has good abilities; his income, though small, is sufficient for the present, and, if you rectify the injustice you have hitherto done to Anthony, whatever I have to leave will go to my godchild.'

'You do not consider what it is for me to be left alone in my old age,' said Sir Richard.

'It is not a consideration which ought to



interfere with the natural fitness of things. You and I have had our day, and we cannot make a better use of our small remnant of life than in giving a fair start to the younger generation. Besides, you will not be alone ; Anthony and Mrs. Bertram will take their rightful place in this house, and you could not have more dutiful children.'

' They may easily be more dutiful than Thomasina,' observed Sir Richard.

' I would not harp too much on that string. She will be dutiful and affectionate enough if you give her her own way in this matter. She has had it all her life, and she cannot help feeling that you are hard upon her now.'

' Well, well, settle it as you please,' said Sir Richard impatiently. ' I am not going to write to Noel myself, and, if he comes here, I shall not be decently civil to him.'

From this speech, ungracious as it was, Mrs. Grey felt that the victory was won.

Anthony looked incredulous when she told him that Sir Richard had withdrawn his opposition, although he could not yet cordially approve of the match, and Anthony himself, if he could be assured of his father's consent, was quite ready to consider Noel an unexceptionable son-in-law. 'Of course,' added Mrs. Grey, 'you understand what is involved in Thomasina's marriage? You cannot leave Sir Richard alone in this large house.'

'Mary will not like to break up our happy home,' said Anthony, 'but, if it comes before us as a duty, of course it must be done.'

Mary and Thomasina had been sitting together, and Mary was quite ready to express her sympathy, if the opportunity offered, but Thomasina was dispirited and shrank from any allusion to her love. She thought that no one but Edward could understand her mood, and, when he was by her side, she had

been confident that nothing could sever them ; but, now that he was far away, she was inclined to think that the obstacles to their union were insurmountable. At last Mrs. Grey came in, with a face expressive of satisfaction at the success of her diplomacy.

‘ You need not go away,’ said she, as Mary began to gather up her work. ‘ I do not think that what I have to say need be a secret to any of the family. Sir Richard is not so very hard to move after all ; if Mr. Noel does not want to marry an heiress, he is to be made welcome to marry Thomasina.’

‘ Oh, Aunt Thomasina !’ exclaimed her niece, flinging her arms round the ‘ old lady, and kissing her cheek with entire oblivion of the bristles which she had once detected there. ‘ I did not believe that even you could have persuaded him.’

‘ I have had experience, you see,’ said Mrs. Grey. ‘ It is not the first Bertram marriage which I have had to arrange, although I am

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afraid that it must be the last. I shall hardly live to compose Dick's little difficulties.'

'I am so very glad that it is settled,' said Mary, and she said it from her heart, although she thought of poor Robin even while she spoke, wondering whether, if his suit had been prosecuted with the like vigour, the family opposition might have been as easily overcome.

'You may well be glad. Now there will be no need to stint the boys in white pinafores for the present, or in an Eton education for the future. Anthony will set up his hunters again, and you must discard all your old gowns, for it will be Thomasina's turn to economise. Do you mind, my dear?'

'I do not mind anything,' said Thomasina, 'except that Edward cannot hear this moment how happy we are. Do you think it possible that he can have come down to Marston Abbas on the chance of hearing what is decided?'

‘All folly is possible in love ; but, as he told me to write to him in London, I do not think it probable,’ said Mrs. Grey.

‘Then you must write to him at once—a long letter, Aunt Thomasina—and I will put in a little line at the end.’

‘I think it would be better to defer your share in the correspondence until we hear from himself that he does not want to marry an heiress.’

‘We have heard that already,’ said Thomasina impatiently ; ‘you know, Polly, that if I had ever found myself in possession of the money which is yours and Anthony’s by right, I should have given it all back to you on the very next day.’

‘In that case,’ replied Mrs. Grey, ‘it is fortunate for Anthony and Polly, as you irreverently call them, that you did not fulfil my first intention of marrying our friend Sir Harry ; for his mother would have taken too good care to tie up your fortune in settlement

to give you a chance of releasing it from any abstract love of justice.'

Two days after this Edward Noel again presented himself at Bertram's Chase. There had been some talk of his becoming Anthony's guest at the cottage; for, since Thomasina was to inherit nothing from her grandfather, it was on Anthony that the arrangements naturally devolved. But Mrs. Grey gave her voice in favour of their all remaining at the Chase. 'If Thomasina and Sir Richard are left together,' she said, 'there will be constant and perhaps fresh misunderstanding, and he will be jealous of every hour which the lovers spend in each other's company; but he will resign himself to the inevitable if they are all and every day together.'

When he came Sir Richard wondered at his impudence, because he did not look ashamed of himself, but was grateful, and proud, and happy. By-and-by the old man began to watch their happiness with a kindly

eye, and to smile at the little wiles by which Thomasina strove to promote a better understanding between her grandfather and her lover. When it became necessary for Noel to return to his Parliamentary duties Sir Richard was filled with compassion for Thomasina's extravagant grief, and was the first to suggest that he might find it possible to run down for Saturdays and Sundays. Mrs. Grey prolonged her stay at the Chase, from the conviction that, as the time approached for drawing up the settlements, nothing but a desire to maintain his character for consistency in her eyes would restrain Sir Richard from making a considerable addition to Thomasina's portion. As it was, he contented himself with having Lady Bertram's handsomest jewels reset for her, and, on the day before the wedding, he presented her with a cheque for a thousand pounds as his contribution towards the expenses of setting up house.

‘There is one thing which I should like better than your present,’ said Thomasina, fondling the hand that gave it to her; ‘I want to hear that you love Edward a little—that you wish to see us happy.’

‘I see that you are happy,’ said Sir Richard; ‘I try to think well of the man who has made you so.’

Here the biography of Thomasina Bertram ends. As Mrs. Noel she still survives, a happy wife and mother, and the promise of her youth and undeveloped powers, as it appeared to her husband on the occasion of their first meeting, is amply fulfilled, although for some years her interest in the welfare of the nation was postponed to that of her babies, and she is now beginning to live over again her days of youthful romance in the opening lives of her daughters.

Sir Richard did not long survive the marriage, and it was whispered in the neighbourhood, by no one more persistently than



by Lady Camden, that the shock of that event hastened his end; but, as he lived to the ripe age of eighty-two, and appeared to be in perfect health almost up to the hour of his death, the assertion may be dismissed as a calumny. The old man, who, with all his faults of temper and of judgment, was an honourable, warm-hearted gentleman of the old school, was missed by many, but by no one was his memory more loyally cherished than by the grey-haired son whom he had flouted and held in subjection for sixty years of his life. Anthony followed him to the grave with deep and sincere grief, and upheld his example to his own sons as that of a man whose excellences must put to shame the shortcomings of the succeeding generations.

THE END.

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